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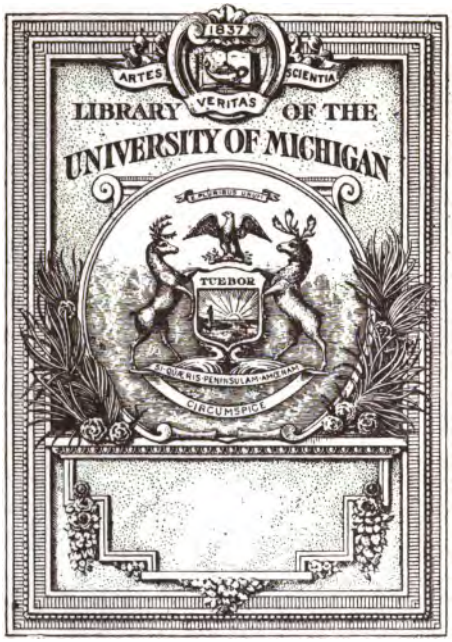
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THE MONEY-MAKER

[LE BRASSEUR D'AFFAIRES]

BY

GEORGES OHNET

AUTHOR OF

'THE IRONMASTER,' 'THE WOMAN OF MYSTERY,' ETC.

TRANSLATED BY F. ROTHWELL, B.A.

LONDON

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1904

THE MONEY-MAKER

PART THE FIRST

CHAPTER I

NEAR an open window, on whose sill a number of gillyflowers were growing in a wooden box, sat Madame Dartigues, working. Her agile fingers were engaged on an elegant dress which certainly was not intended for her own wear. Intent on her task, she never raised her eyes from her work, except from time to time to steal a glance at a small four-year-old boy playing on the ground, and actively engaged in breaking to pieces a wooden doll. The room occupied by mother and child was the dining-room of a flat situated on the fifth floor of a gloomy-looking house in the Rue Condorcet. A scrupulous cleanliness evidently attempted to disguise the poverty of its inmates, though the scanty furniture, the rickety table, and broken stove, on which the dinner was cooking, all testified to a difficulty in making both ends meet, and to the lack of any kind of comfort. A sudden knock at the

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door interrupted the work of the woman, who, without rising from her seat, exclaimed :

'Come in !'

The door opened, and the blue uniform of a bank official could be distinguished in the obscurity of the passage. The child laid aside his toy and stood upright, greatly interested at the sight of the large leather bill-case into which the official had plunged his hand.

'Does M. Jean Dartigues live here ?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I have here a Durocher draft, now due—a hundred francs. . . . Have you the money ?'

The woman blushed. Placing her work on a small table in front of her, she pushed back her chair, and, taking the offered draft, examined it with mingled fear and anxiety. The bank official was well acquainted with such proceedings, and had long ago been proof against any expressions of anguish caused by the sight of a coloured paper, recalling the falling due of a bill, a matter so easy to forget; accordingly, as he had no time to lose, he said in arrogant tones :

'Are you in a condition to pay ?'

'No, sir,' replied the poor woman in accents of nervous anxiety. 'My husband has said nothing to me of this bill. . . .'

'Well ! well ! that is your own affair. You will settle that question between yourselves.'

As he spoke, he tore away a leaf from a small note-book, wrote on it a few words, and left it on the table, with the words :

'You have until three o'clock to-morrow afternoon to pay.'

Closing his bill-case, he placed it under his arm and left the room. As soon as the door was closed, the mother sank into her chair, her limbs refusing to support the weight of her body, and a deadly pallor overspreading her face. Tears she could not withhold streamed down her cheeks as she murmured in heart-broken accents :

'Ah, *mon Dieu!* Where shall I find these hundred francs ? And if I do not find them, what will become of us ?'

The child had drawn nearer his mother, and was watching her tears flow in silence. At length he broke silence, and said :

'What are you crying for, mamma ? I thought it was only children who cried, not fathers and mothers !'

This innocent remark redoubled the poor woman's grief. Taking the little one in her arms, she said :

'Ah, my dear Pierre, if only you knew ! . . . But then . . . you are too young to understand. . . . What a blessing for you that it is so ! But I am in great trouble, my darling !'

'Who has made you cry, mamma ?' asked the child. 'Tell me, and I will beat him !' he continued, his little face dark with indignation.

'Ah, my darling, neither you nor I can do anything against him ; if you could understand, you would not even wish it ! As he pleases, he can save or ruin us, for we are absolutely dependent on him ! Ah, *mon Dieu !* he is ruining us and himself at the same time !'

The poor woman seated herself once more before the table, and, with renewed activity, drew stitch after stitch in the light-coloured silk.

She was a pretty, fair-haired woman, with brown eyes, dressed with the greatest simplicity, though with a certain amount of elegance. A pensive wrinkle gave her brow a certain severity which her smile belied whenever she cast her eyes on the child seated at her feet. She had every appearance of being greatly superior to her present position, and quite out of place in this poverty-stricken abode. It was not easy to conjecture how this handsome woman could have become stranded in this wretched garret, a prey to poverty and grief.

And yet her story was a very simple one, closely resembling that of so many poor girls whose parents, acted upon by an overweening ambition, give them an instruction superior to their position. She was born at Rouen, and was the daughter of a harbour-inspector. Her mother, before her marriage, had been a Mademoiselle Delamarre, of Monville. The father of this young lady had held out before the eyes of the harbour-inspector a life annuity, a far easier thing to promise than a dowry would have been to pay in ready cash. So long as the father-in-law had lived this annuity had been paid, but one evening the old man was found dead in his carriage on returning from the fair at Clères, and his landlord, to whom two years' rent was due, had laid hands on such property as he could seize. The old mother had then fallen under the charge of her son-in-law without bringing with her any other resources than some personal jewellery, a beautiful wardrobe, and large quantities of linen goods. They lived together in the tiny house in the Rue des Charettes, and the little Francine, then twelve years of age, was obliged, by

steady and serious studies, to insure the future of the family. The harbour-inspector would say :

'My influence at the Préfecture and the support of the Town Council will easily enable my daughter, once she has obtained her certificates, to obtain a position in the Post Office or as a school-teacher. But she must work, for on work depends our own future as well as her own. With my pension and savings we can all live happily together.'

The honest inspector was dreaming the dream of a sage, but how many are realized in actual life ? Francine did not belie her father's hopes so far as her school studies were concerned. She easily passed her examinations, and seemed on the point of receiving a good post, when chance threw Jean Dartigues along her path.

Dartigues was a handsome provincial, with dark complexion and flashing eyes, who had left Montpellier to seek his fortune, and was at that time engaged as overseer in a calico factory at Petit-Quevilly. He was a good draughtsman, and the workmen were in the habit of calling him the Artist. He had so far influenced his master as to induce him to abandon the old-fashioned models in use, and adopt new ones of a more modern style. Though rather reckless, he was yet full of ideas, his principal defect being an entire absence of continuity in his projects ; what he considered of supreme importance and interest one day would have lost all charm for him on the morrow.

With such a character he had hitherto ruined his naturally brilliant endowments, and had given himself more trouble in reaching no result than others do in obtaining the greatest success. After wandering about

France from factory to factory, undertaking different occupations, in all of which he excelled, though he could bind himself to none, he now found himself in the outskirts of Rouen, only moderately paid and anything but contented, but ever building castles in the air.

He was an eloquent talker, warming beneath the fire of his own words, and the first person he convinced was himself. Had his tendencies been of a subversive character, the workmen would have found in him an excellent leader. Strange to relate, however, he had never dabbled in politics, to which he appeared absolutely indifferent. Wealth was his fascination; he wished to become rich, and once fairly launched on his favourite theme he waxed strangely eloquent. His countenance was transfigured, his features became animated with passion, and an ecstatic look appeared in his eyes, as though some sudden mirage had unfolded to his gaze the most wonderful treasures of earth.

Then he would explain in glowing terms the new enterprise he had planned, destined in a wonderfully short time to give prodigious results. He described operations, calculated risks, and profits, success being always assured. Without troubling about ways or means, he went forward, carried away by his own imagination, ready to abandon the real for the imaginary. In this way, always dropping the prey for its shadow, like the dog in the fable, he had come to be satisfied with the meagre wages he received at the works. In his moments of lucidity he would say to himself, as he smiled at his efforts and their lack of success:

'Jean Dartigues, you are like the nimble, untiring

squirrel, ever turning in his cage, without making the slightest progress, though giving himself the illusion of motion. Good! But it shall not always be so; the day will come when the wheel will turn to some purpose. Wait a little!'

One fourteenth of July, at a popular ball organized on the harbour, Francine found herself in the presence of Jean Dartigues. The inspector had not been able to avoid being present along with his family at this fête. Dock labourers and garrison soldiers were there in full numbers, whilst beer and punch were drunk in copious draughts. Francine's partner, a Custom-House officer who lodged in the house in the Rue de Charettes, proposed a walk along the quay.

Jean Dartigues, who chanced to be at Rouen, had been brought to the ball by a companion, and introduced to Francine's father. Being a fine dancer and anxious to shine, he quickly became the life and soul of the company. Of a generous nature, he regaled all around him, and his fortnight's pay, which he had received only the previous night, quickly found its way into the coffers of the liquor-vendor, whilst the careless Dartigues strutted about and gave himself the airs of a lord.

Leaving the ballroom with his friend and Francine, they proceeded along the quays among pyramids of barrels and mountains of bales. Every moment they were obliged to cross a cable or to guard against the huge iron rings used to moor the ships, and Dartigues had offered his arm to Francine. They walked together for some time, and finally found themselves in front of a music-hall. The sound of instruments reached their ears, recalling them to the brutal facts of life in

the midst of the soothing serenity that surrounded them. Dartigues began to relate all his plans to the young girl, and tell her his hopes. Beneath the star-lit sky the dreamer's face appeared wonderful to Francine. His companions had attached no importance to what they considered as mere boasts, but the inspector's daughter believed in the genius of the man now giving utterance to his ambitious projects in such captivating language. She returned to the ballroom in dreamy mood, and as Dartigues was leaving, she had followed her father without the faintest regret.

The following week she had again seen the overseer, between whom and the inspector a kind of intimacy had sprung up. Dartigues paid assiduous court to Francine, her father tacitly approving, as he himself had also fallen under the spell. Still all his plans for the future were overthrown by the appearance of Dartigues into their common life. Francine loved him passionately, he also was in love, and easily persuaded himself that never had such a wealth of affection before been poured forth from his heart.

The marriage took place, and for a year the young couple were perfectly happy; except that Dartigues twice changed his occupation, and spent all the savings of his father-in-law in an attempt at chemically colouring cotton stuffs, everything went well with the family. The inspector consoled himself for the loss of his money by reflecting with touching confidence:

'Dartigues has failed this time, but it will not be long before I shall recover all my money. A man of his intelligence cannot fail to succeed in the long-

run. My money in his hands is equivalent to an investment at a hundred per cent.'

The money never returned. One fine day the dreamer imagined that the reason results did not answer to his expectations was that the provinces were a poor theatre for such an artist as he was. The idea of going to Paris came into his mind. On speaking of this to the others he met considerable resistance. The fear of mighty cities and anxiety concerning the unknown rendered Francine's parents opposed for the first time to the seductive promises of Dartigues.

Their opposition, however, had no other effect than to exasperate this latter. He was not one of those in whom contradiction induces reflection. Opposition to his plans merely excited his imagination, a kind of madness took possession of him, making him look upon all who attempted to check him as his mortal enemies.

His vehemence terrified Francine, and threw into despair her old parents, who saw that nothing would prevent his putting into execution the plan of leaving the district. For the first time the inspector asked himself whether his son-in-law was not rather a maniac than a genius. Francine's despair, a certain amount of confidence still remaining in the old man's mind, and a general disinclination to cause pain, all contributed to make the inspector resolve not to break with his son-in-law. All the same he refused him all help, declared that under no pretext would he leave Rouen, and that a place at the family hearth would always be ready for these adventurous children who were causing such serious trouble to their old parents. Thereupon Dartigues, who had no real

feeling of bitterness on the matter, and saw only the immediate result, made peace, and took his departure, accompanied by his wife.

At Paris his excitement increased tenfold. True, the great city offered greater scope for the fulfilment of his ambitious schemes than he had hitherto known, but he had never suspected that poverty and misery would there be a hundred times more severe than in a quiet country town, whose inhabitants are more inclined to help one another than in this mighty Paris where no one knows his neighbour, and goes about armed for attack or defence as though in a state of perpetual warfare. Funds which were so scanty in parsimonious Normandy were offered in Paris on every hand. He had only to open a journal to find the most tempting advertisements on the fourth page.

With his usual confidence, Dartigues called on several money-lenders, whom he found very cordial and attentive, though reserved. Money, which in the journals seemed to flow in columns, became a very rare article in the money-lenders' offices. Dartigues' fine phrases for the first time broke harmless on the solid surface of a stony clairvoyance; he could not even succeed in obtaining a single exclamation of astonishment.

These people seemed to have had experience in all kinds of eloquence and fascination put into practice for obtaining funds. Impassive, they were firmly decided to leave nothing to chance. Now chance was the usual factor in all Dartigues' calculations, success would certainly fall before him from the very heavens. However, he found work in a coloured paper-works in the Villette Quarter, and all the time he was designing

æsthetic models for amateur snobs he continued to turn over and over in his mind all kinds of ideas, like a diamond-seeker sorting out pebbles in the sand in the hope of discovering another Sancy.

Meanwhile he had become the father of a baby boy, who had been baptized Pierre by the inspector, its godfather. The old man's wife had died, and he had resisted all the entreaties of his son-in-law who invited him to come and live in Paris with them. The stubborn Norman still continued his duties without the slightest thought of retiring on a pension; from time to time he wrote to his daughter doleful letters foreboding ruin and misery, perhaps worse, in that devouring city to which her madman of a husband had taken her.

Francine never replied to her father without assuring him she was happy. And yet Dartigues, incapable of resisting his whims, had long neglected her. The poor dwelling of the unhappy woman no longer even heard the words of tenderness and confidence which had cheered her in the darkest hours at Rouen. Now Dartigues was always complaining about his bad luck, and returned home with a countenance besotted with debauchery. Led away by his companions, he had begun to frequent the cafés, where, after drinking a few aperitives which set his brain on fire, he would once again give way to his dreams of fortune.

One of his worst companions was a bank-clerk named Claude Brun. Short and thin, always dressed in black, apparently modest and strictly ceremonious, he had the air of a priest dressed as an ordinary citizen. On examining him attentively, however, his face, marked with small-pox, and those two piercing

dark-browed eyes, gave him a character of ferocious and circumspect cunning. Anyone who had seen Claude Brun laugh soon learned to dread him. The contracted jaws, teeth projecting from pallid lips, and the sharp hissing sound which came from his throat whenever he spoke, everything in his person suggested the most atrocious villainy.

His banking experience had quickly gained him a considerable influence over Dartigues, whose imagination he fired with tales of speculation on ''Change.' Dartigues was only too ready to gamble, but for this a certain capital was necessary, and money was the very thing he lacked. He could not dispose of the whole of his pay, though he never took anything home, and the household expenses were met by the results of Francine's work. All Dartigues' ready money was spent in smoke and drink, a double intoxication benumbing conscience and brain alike.

He had brought Claude Brun with him. Francine from the very first felt an utter lack of sympathy with this man who could not look her in the face, and seemed ill at ease in her presence. When alone with her he pretended to pity the neglected wife, assuring her he did all he could to keep Dartigues from ruin. He was serious and methodical, and if Francine would only have confidence in him he would certainly exercise a beneficent influence over Dartigues.

'You see, Mme. Dartigues,' he would say, 'I am afraid he will bring you to utter ruin. You are so indulgent that you can form no idea of his conduct. It is a great pity, for if you were aware of your own interests you would certainly not allow yourself to be treated in this way. . . . Have confidence in me;

your husband has nothing but scorn for you. He returns home to sleep out his drunken fits, and to insult you. . . . Indeed you are too patient, for he shows himself more amiable with others. . . .'

He gradually drew nearer, and with diabolical audacity whispered his treacherous words into her ears :

'One of these days he will leave you, and your child and yourself will be utterly helpless. Now, I earn a good living, and have saved a certain sum. . . . You need have no fear of Dartigues, he is absolutely at my disposal, for he owes me money !'

At these words Francine's generous blood boiled in her veins as with flashing eyes she stood before Claude Brun, and said :

'So you offer to give me revenge on Dartigues, do you ? You could not offer me a greater insult ! Look at yourself and you will know my reply !'

The tones of insulting pity, in which these words were uttered, rendered the bank-clerk so utterly overpowered by passion that he rushed at Francine and seized her in his arms. She resisted desperately, and in the struggle the cradle was overturned; the child awoke, uttering a cry of distress. The mother sprang on her opponent like a lioness, and struck Claude in the face. At that moment a calm voice was heard outside the door :

'Ah, what is going on here ?'

The door, in which the key had been left, opened, and the grave face of a young man appeared on the threshold. On seeing him Claude Brun stepped back, whilst Francine seized her child, which had been terrified into convulsive sobs. The unexpected visitor

entered the room. He was a young man of about twenty-four years of age, dressed in black, with pale thin face and thoughtful eyes, his whole person offering a certain character of austerity. After attentively examining the faces of the man and woman, he addressed Claude Brun in tones of singular authority :

'Why did madame call for help? What are you doing here? I see it is not with her consent. You must go. . . .'

The clerk, with downcast eyes, stammered out :

'I am a friend of Dartigues, M. Appel. . . . I live in this house. . . .'

The young man whom Claude addressed as 'Monsieur Appel' did not appear to be astonished that the other knew his name. He said in quiet tones :

'You may be the husband's, you certainly are not the wife's friend. It is not wise to impose one's presence when it is not welcome. . . .'

He pointed to the door. Francine, mute and apparently indifferent, was nursing her child in her arms. Claude turned to see if she acquiesced in this rough dismissal. She did not raise her eyes, but showered kisses on her baby boy, who was now beginning to smile. Claude bowed his head, and without a word left the room.

M. Appel was one of the humblest tenants of the Rue Condorcet, but, all the same, one of the most important persons in the quarter. As a hospital doctor, he attended gratis to the poor who came to ask for his advice and help. His confrères had often protested against the competition thus caused, but as Appel never accepted the slightest pay from any of his miserable clients, it had been found impossible to prevent him from exercising

charity under such conditions. He was a powerful worker, who made up at night for the time lost in gratuitous consultations during the day.

Appel never left his room except to go to the hospital and to his classes. He would return laden with papers and books, and, locking himself in his fifth-storey room, would plunge into the physiological mines of modern science. He was an ascetic; his life had never known the meaning of pleasure, and his time was spent between meditation and study. In addition to his medical researches, Frédéric was interested in sociological speculations. The young deputy of Sarreguemines, René Des Barres, was his intimate friend, one whose influence was predominant in guiding the ideas of the young doctor.

Though certain of attaining to the highest university distinctions, Des Barres had abandoned public instruction to fling himself into the whirlpool of journalism and uphold socialistic doctrines. Older by three years than Frédéric Appel, the brilliant orator had exercised a great influence on his friend's thoughts. There existed, however, an essential difference in their separate modes of conceiving human progress: Des Barres was a materialist, but Appel, with an elevation of thought which raised him to a far higher level than his comrade, conceived society and its problems from a more spiritual basis. The affection the two felt for one another had withstood this fundamental difference of opinion; what would have been for less powerful minds a cause of uncompromising hostility had served as a basis for mutual esteem. Des Barres and Appel, in one another's presence, were sure of their individual integrity of conscience. Each in his own sphere had

the highest opinion of the other, and though neither expected ever to succeed in convincing the other, their respect and love were mutual.

Des Barres had already gained a certain renown by reason of his passionate polemical speeches, whilst Appel was still quietly and unostentatiously working in his garret. As he was without fortune, the young student wished above all to have an assured means of existence, so as to unreservedly devote himself to his plans of humanitarian and medical reform.

Following on his chance intervention between Mme. Dartigues and Claude Brun, when Appel happened to be passing by the door and heard Francine's voice speaking to her child, he entered for a moment to see how the family was progressing. He made inquiries about the child's health, and asked a few delicate questions concerning their resources. Not once did he mention the name of Claude Brun; that episode seemed as completely forgotten by him as though it had never taken place.

Several times he met Dartigues, but on such occasions he merely exchanged a few words with him, and would not enter the room; he seemed to find an utter want of sympathy between Francine's husband and himself. Dartigues, on his side, made easy sport of the gravity and reserve of their young neighbour. His turbulent nature was far from understanding the austerity that characterized every action of Appel's life. It would have been impossible to find two brains more unlike than those of these two men, or two temperaments more opposed to one another.

'What does he do, always shut up in his room?' asked Dartigues. 'We never hear him either stir or

speak, and I am sure he has no idea even how to laugh!'

Francine, with head bent over her needlework, did not care to reply to Dartigues' sarcastic remarks. She seemed to have made up her mind not to speak of the young doctor, and she had to be driven to the end before she would reply.

'You know him, all the same, I suppose?' said Dartigues; 'for he does not hesitate to call when I am not at home. . . .'

'He calls to ask about the health of the little one, ever since he attended him for the measles. . . .'

'Brun affirms that he comes here rather for the mother's sake than the child's. . . .'

A blush spread over Francine's pale cheeks.

'If you stayed oftener at home, you would be better acquainted with what takes place there.'

Francine seemed reconciled to the solitary life Dartigues imposed upon her. She never left the house except once or twice a week to bring back the needlework entrusted to her by a large millinery firm in the Rue Lafayette. From the attention she attracted in the streets, she knew she was pretty, but this never caused her any anxiety. Only when Appel entered the room did a light come over her countenance. All the same, she appeared perfectly calm, her voice never changed, and it would have been impossible for the young man to have suspected the lively interest Francine took in everything concerning him.

And yet she testified this as well as she could by petty details and a touching attention she gave to his wardrobe when he was out. She knew his habits, and arranged with the concierge to attend to her

neighbour's linen. This she mended and ironed when necessary, whilst Appel, who was quite indifferent and always absorbed in meditation, never knew whose delicate and friendly hand had arranged in perfect order everything in his room. One day she chanced to leave a small bag of orris among his linen. This was the end of the mystery, for Appel, whose sense of smell was more developed than that of sight, noticed the agreeable odour, and, after making inquiries, discovered that Mme. Dartigues had for several months past been his mysterious housekeeper. He was affected even to tears by the discovery. Being of an exquisitely sensitive nature, however, and divining that secrecy would largely contribute to Francine's pleasure in her friendly action, he refused to take the rather vulgar satisfaction of thanking her, and allowed her to continue this anonymous kindness he benefited by. In his modesty, he attributed to mere gratitude what was owing to a much stronger sentiment, and continued as before living in friendly relations with the young woman.

For eighteen months Francine had been struggling along amid the frightful convulsions of her ruined home, seeing the burden of debt increase week after week, and selling by degrees everything of value in the house. The furniture had found its way to the second-hand dealer's store, whilst clothes and linen had been taken to the pawn-shop. Food was often lacking, and the mother had more than once dined on a crust of bread, watered with her tears, whilst the little Pierre ate a bowl of soup carefully saved from the previous day's repast. Never had Francine's activity been so great as when she was obliged to depend on herself

alone for obtaining her child the necessaries of life. Work was scarce and badly paid, and Dartigues often searched through the drawers, and laid hands on the week's pay of his wife.

On the very morning the bank *employé* had called at the house, with the unpaid bill, a violent scene had taken place between Dartigues and Francine. The dreamer pretended he was about to undertake a new affair which would very soon rescue them from all their difficulties, and bring them a handsome fortune. A rich ship-owner of Havre had just inherited a large estate in Venezuela, but found himself unable to leave his business to attend to his 'haciendas' in the new world. He wanted a young man, active and intelligent, for the management of a scheme which was destined to produce huge profits. Dartigues' imagination ran away with him, as he already saw himself at the head of this immense farm.

'Just think, Francine, thousands and thousands of acres, an estate as large as the half of Normandy! Grass growing without manure or cultivation of any kind, higher than a man's head! Seven thousand head of cattle, without counting innumerable flocks of sheep—a veritable army. . . . The skins will be converted into leather, and the flesh preserved, whilst the wool will go straight to the weaving-sheds of America. Down there in South America one can live the life of a king, with hundreds of servants and everything in the greatest profusion. The owner of this unexploited fortune which is lying there sterile is waiting for me to take charge of his property. I must leave this very evening. But, then, I have no money for the voyage, and surely you will not let me

miss such an opportunity. For a paltry hundred francs, you would not . . .'

'And where do you expect me to find them?' interrupted the young woman. 'If I had any money, would my child be deprived of the necessaries of life? You have taken all there was here, and there is nothing left to sell, not even the pawn-pledges. . . .'

'Write to your father.'

'Never! He has given me far more than I deserved. . . . I cannot tell him that we are at the end of our resources; he is wretched enough at the thought that my marriage has turned out so unhappily!'

'After all, I did not take you by force! You were willing enough to be married. You had confidence in me, and thought you were marrying a candidate for fortune!'

'I thought I was marrying an honest man; but I made a huge mistake!'

Dartigues leapt to his feet, his eyes flashing with rage.

'No money, and nothing but insult to give me? Very well; I am off!'

Francine wavered. She felt quite as much pity as scorn for this deceiver who was ever his own dupe.

'One word: wait till to-morrow, when I will call on my mistress; perhaps she will give me something on account for the work I am engaged on.'

'No; I cannot postpone such an important affair; another would seize the opportunity, and this one . . .'

'Who told you about it?'

'Claude.'

'He is cheating you. Certainly he will never be satisfied till he has ruined you!'

'He is to come as my partner!'

'And you think I will help you to embark on an enterprise in which I should have to tolerate the presence of such a person? . . . There! my mind is made up. . . . I would prefer to deliberately ruin the whole undertaking!'

'I can quite believe it. Since you have made up your mind to expect nothing more of me, you have begun to hate me!'

'No, I do not hate you in the least; my heart would be full of compassion for you had you remained kind and good as you used to be. . . . I would even consent to believe still in the success of your plans if your evil conduct had not made such success impossible. Those who win their way to fortune do not waste their energies in empty words and noisy demonstration. Men of action are not like you; they are serious and concentrated on their one object. . . .'

'Like the young saw-bones next door, I suppose?' jeered Dartigues.

'Like M. Appel, yes,' replied Francine, exasperated. 'He never drinks or vociferates; he works. . . .'

'Then, he must have savings,' said Dartigues, with a horrible grin; 'borrow the hundred francs from him!'

Francine rose to her feet, and, pointing to the door, said:

'Leave the room, you wretch!'

'If I go now,' he replied in threatening accents, 'take care! I shall never return!'

'All the better!' she exclaimed passionately.

Returning, he looked at her steadily, and said:

'Is he already more than your friend, that you do not wish me here?'

Unable to endure this additional insult, Francine sank into a chair, and burst into sobs.

'You wretch! After all the proofs of affection and devotion I have given you! How can you insult me in this way!'

Dartigues shrugged his shoulders as he replied:

'There! I cannot stand a woman's tears; I must go.'

Violently throwing open the door, he made his way into the corridor, uttering imprecations beneath his breath. Francine listened for a few moments, hoping he would return. His footsteps gradually sank away into silence, and the poor woman, after wiping the tears from her eyes, once again resumed her work.

CHAPTER II

'MAY I come in?' asked a voice at once gentle and grave.

'Yes,' replied Francine, setting on the floor her little Pierrè, who ran at once to the door.

On the threshold appeared the handsome, dignified form of Appel emerging from the dark corridor. His arms were laden with books, as he was doubtless returning from the Latin Quarter. Taking off his hat, he laid bare his moist brow, exposing to view his fine chestnut hair, which he wore rather long.

'How hot you look!' said Francine. 'Take a seat; I have still a chair left to offer you. . . . Pierre, give M. Appel a chair. . . .'

The young man took a seat a few paces away from the young woman, and fixing his gray, penetrating eyes on her face, he said:

'You have been weeping again to-day; what is the matter?'

She would not confess the wretched cause of her trouble, and, with an affected air of indifference, said:

'I have had some slight worries, and I find it difficult to control myself at times!'

He turned away, feeling that his look troubled her, and turned his attention to the child, who was playing by his side. The prattling child said:

'Mamma has been crying because a man came with this paper. . . .'

As the little one made this innocent revelation, he waved the bank notice in the air.

'Pierre, not another word!' exclaimed the mother.

But it was too late, the paper was already in Appel's hands. After reading it, he threw it on the table.

'Then, this is the reason you trouble yourself. What is this notice? Certainly you know nothing about it, otherwise you would not have been astonished at its appearance. Am I not right?'

She made no reply. As she continued sewing with increased rapidity, the needle trembled in her fingers. It was a humiliation and a torture for her to see the secret of her wretched poverty exposed before the man she loved. She imagined that she had already fallen in Appel's esteem, by reason of the commonplace work she was engaged in, and that this avowal of her trouble debased her still further in his eyes. A mere simple workwoman, so far beneath him, she must seem to him, so she thought, an object of mingled scorn and compassion. The young man appeared to guess that some such ideas were troubling her, for he answered with tender grace:

'Such a fate is far different from the one you deserve. You, with your cultured and well-educated mind, have devoted your life to manual toil to supply food to those around you. I know nothing more honourable than such a life. Still, in return for such a sacrifice, you might at least have expected a little material, if not moral, security. Happiness is seldom found in this world. Those who have an assured peace of mind and liberty of conscience may consider themselves privi-

leged individuals. I should be very glad to see you in full enjoyment of both these benefits. Though I cannot prevent the suffering in your heart, at any rate, I shall be very pleased if I can prevent you being persecuted beyond your strength. . . . Permit me to lend you this small sum ?'

'No, M. Appel,' she said in trembling accents; 'I cannot allow it.'

'Have you, then, no sentiment of friendship towards me, that you refuse me the right of doing you so trifling a service ? You may return it next month. . . .'

'You are not rich yourself, and it would inconvenience you to lend me such a sum. I cannot accept.'

'You are mistaken,' said the young man, a smile illumining his noble countenance; 'for the moment I am quite rich. This very morning I received two hundred francs. . . . My principal, Professor Chartier, took me with him to assist in an operation. His patient was a millionaire, and I was exceedingly well paid for merely handing over the necessary instruments. . . . You see, you may accept my offer without the slightest scruple. . . . You would indeed be placing me under an obligation, for I do not know what to do with this money.'

She smiled as she thought of the ascetic life the young student lived. To what useful purpose could he put this unexpected windfall ! How many good things which he rigorously denied himself of were represented by these two hundred francs ! And yet he offered half the amount, begging the poor woman to accept it as a loan, as though it were a favour she was doing him. A delightful feeling of warmth entered Francine's heart; she felt she had met a sentiment of delicacy akin

to her own. Accordingly she found courage to look Appel in the face, and say :

'Very well ; I accept. Were I to show myself too proud to refuse what you offer with such generosity, I should deem myself unworthy of your sympathy. I thank you.'

As she spoke, she held out her hand, which he seized and kept for a moment within his own. It was a small, well-shaped hand, slightly hardened by reason of the household work she was forced to undertake and carry through all day long.

'This hand,' he said, 'was not intended for rough toil. All the same, it is none the less beautiful from being so actively . . .'

Francine, moved beyond her wont, changed the conversation, and asked Appel about his studies. He replied with no small animation :

'Oh, I am on the point of succeeding. The president is an eminent physiologist who is entirely in my favour, and I should be very unlucky did I not obtain a position. . . . And then . . . most of my difficulties will be at an end. . . .'

'You will have a large number of patients, I suppose ?' asked Francine, who could not understand any other success for a doctor.

'Less than I have at present, for I attend to the whole quarter gratis. . . . But I shall be independent, and able to devote myself to scientific research with the greatest liberty. After being all my life a mere scholar, I shall begin to teach and devote myself, body and soul, to the propagation of my ideas. I should like to see far less routine in medical science ; I should like it to take into consideration the mind as

well as the body of the patient, for the moral has considerable influence over the physical. When a physician has practised therapeutics, he thinks he has done everything. To consider a patient's stomach as an alembic, and introduce therein the different poisons catalogued by the Codex, is a chemist's business. Besides this, the mind must be considered intellectual, life restored, an atmosphere of confidence created, nature fortified—not in its lowest elements, but in its very highest aspects. Deep in the nature of every being lie latent fluidic forces which may be utilized for healing purposes. Not by mechanical means do I wish to see them exercised; my programme includes neither hypnotism nor magnetism, but simply vital force. . . . Ah, you do not understand me,' said Appel gaily, as he saw Francine's eyes fixed on him, with intent but easy expression. 'I have not been precise enough, but now I will try to explain myself more clearly. . . .'

'Oh, don't stop!' murmured Francine, with clasped hands; 'the very sound of your voice fills me with pleasure. . . .'

With a nod of gratitude, he continued:

'You must have heard of the cures . . . temporary if not definite ones . . . accomplished by the waters of Lourdes. And you cannot think that it has been the medicinal virtues of these waters which have set on their feet patients suffering from paralysis and rheumatism. It is a purely psychical effect produced by intensified faith. To obtain similar results in a great number of nervous disorders, all that is needed is to cultivate the will-power. In former times, men studied this psychical power, as do the Hindoos nowadays; their brahmins and fakirs are living examples of the

fact. Science has degenerated in becoming materialized; atheism, which has now become a medical dogma, because the anatomist, when dissecting the human being, did not find the soul at the end of his scalpel, has dulled the thoughts of the most eminent of men, and prevented them from grasping the idea of a life beyond the grave, which, in their opinion, is merely an unknowable condition of things, though not a state which has no existence. The most recent researches of savants whose lives have been devoted to psychical investigation show that our field of earthly evolution is a very small thing indeed when compared with the eternal immensities in which souls repose when freed from the bonds of their first state of nature. Ah, Francine! this is an eternal subject of controversy between my friend Des Barres and myself. His wonderfully clear mind, with its implacable logic, is blinded by materialism. He sets a limit to human evolution at death, and confines the powers of our being to those purely impulsive manifestations ill co-ordinated and insufficiently varied, which form the actions of our free will. For my part, I find no satisfaction in this intellectual infirmity. I do not believe in the short duration of life; on the other hand, I am convinced that our activity is not set in motion for so short a period of time as is represented by our passage on earth. In human existence, I see nothing but a prologue. Our hopes, our dreams and aspirations must have a meaning; they can be nothing other than presentiments of our future destiny. For my friend and myself, all this constitutes a struggle between two systems, which are not merely philosophical, but political. If men's actions are limited to their career

on earth, the satisfaction of their immediate lusts and appetites becomes a law for all living beings. On the other hand, if existence, with all its difficulties, sufferings, and joys, is merely the introduction to a successive development of psychical states, then it is our duty to be resigned to misfortune and pain, and to endure injustice, for we shall have the certainty of being treated better in the future before us.'

'Such is the teaching of the venerable priest who gave me a Christian training,' said Francine softly. 'Then you are a believer, M. Appel?'

'Not in the manner according to which you have been taught, Francine, though, all the same, I am a firm and convinced believer. I do not attend religious services, and you would never see me within a church, except for a marriage or a funeral. I make no prayers, whilst all the pomp and glory of Catholic worship I considcr unworthy of a religion made to influence the spirit, not merely to seduce the eyes. In this respect, I should be rather in favour of Protestantism, intellectually speaking, were I not repelled by the vindictive sternness of the sect.'

'So your friend Des Barres thinks it possible to find entire satisfaction in this world?'

'He does. To my mind, he is a formidable opponent; not in himself, for he would not injure an insect, but because he preaches his doctrines to others, and with the most rousing eloquence! Thus revolutionary socialists spring up, who translate Des Barres' admirable theories by the significant maxim "Short and sweet!" Hoping for nothing after this life, they use their utmost endeavours to obtain material pleasures before death. Thus it comes about that

a most admirable mind, like Des Barres', becomes the most formidable instrument of social destruction.'

'But you, M. Appel, are opposed to the ideas expressed by your friend, I suppose? Do you consider the world well organized as it is now? Do you not desire any change?'

'Certainly, Francine, a change effected by other means than violence and destruction. Instead of always speaking to men of their rights, which are by no means certain or well defined, they ought to be told of their duties, which are well known and cannot be denied, though they are wilfully neglected, for it is always less flattering to demand sacrifices than to promise advantages. When you say to a man, "You must work hard, be content with little pay," you are certain to meet with less approval than if you say, "You must work little, earn a great deal, and be content with nothing!" There you have in a single phrase the whole difference between the spiritualistic and the materialistic doctrines.'

As he ceased speaking, he placed his hand on the head of the little Pierre, who had listened to him with the utmost attention, charmed not by the meaning of sentences he could not understand, but by the musical cadence of Appel's speech.

'You seem to be a well-disposed listener, my dear child . . . ,' he said. 'I see it is my vocation to speak for the young and humble. . . .'

'That was Christ's mission,' murmured Francine.

'Oh, I do not aspire to so lofty a height of glory,' resumed Appel gaily. 'Besides, I have no taste for martyrdom. My task shall be a much more modest one, and in my own sphere of action I will combat for

my ideas with all the ardour I can. . . . But we seem to have wandered considerably from our starting-point. Just think what a distance we have traversed. I was speaking of vitalism as susceptible of being developed by psychic energy, and here we are discussing the two great systems which at present divide the world. . . . And I have been giving you a lecture on morality, as though you needed one, you who are the very incarnation of all the virtues I recommend to mankind at large.'

'Alas! it is doubtless because I can do no otherwise. . . . I do not consider I have so much merit. . . .'

'To be reconciled to one's condition in life is the most difficult thing on earth, and yet you accomplish this with the most touching patience. You are not happy, and yet you make no complaint. I have been obliged in some measure to force my way into your confidence before discovering your real merit.'

Francine lowered her eyes in confusion. Little Pierre at that moment said in prattling tones:

'When I am grown up I will give you lots of nice dresses, and then you won't cry any more!'

The young man took advantage of the emotion expressed by the young mother at the touching words of her child to rise from his seat, and place a hundred-franc note on the mantelpiece. Taking up his books and hat, he said:

'I have been wearying you quite long enough with my tales, Mme. Dartigues. Your little Pierre has not been so diffuse, but he has spoken a great deal better than I have. Before troubling about the general progress of humanity, we must think of the immediate interests of the individuals who

compose it. Be reasonable and take heart. Be assured that you may absolutely rely on me.'

He bowed, kissed the child, and took his departure. The day passed in work and silence; Francine's rapid needle plied to and fro in endless stitches. This recluse, austere as a nun, neither uttered a word nor hummed a song, the work-woman's ordinary relaxation. The boy, accustomed from birth to his mother's habits, sat playing noiselessly by her side, cutting into tiny pieces the remnants which fell from the table. About four o'clock the mother raised her head, and said:

'Will you have something to eat, my darling? Are you hungry?'

'Yes, mamma.'

She took from the cupboard a piece of bread and a stick of chocolate, which the child immediately attacked, the mother watching him with a look of anxious solicitude. What sombre reflections must have been hers! what a bitter comparison she must have made at that moment between the lot she had dreamed of and the one she had been obliged to submit to! Generally Francine's firm will enabled her to restrain her sufferings, but now, in the silence of her wretched home, in the presence of her child, still unconscious of their misfortune, she could no longer resist the feeling of despair and dejection which had come over her.

She sat there motionless, with dreamy eyes, thinking of the quiet house in the Rue des Charettes, where she had spent her childhood, the only happy time she had known, with her parents. She had left them to follow her master, leaving behind nothing but sadness and grief. What had become of her father, whom

she had not seen for the past two years? He was growing old, all alone, in the empty homestead in which his whole life had been spent.

Suddenly, a knock at the door roused her from her reverie. She exclaimed 'Entrez!' Immediately the door opened, and there appeared on the threshold the smiling, sinister face of Claude Brun. This was the first time he had returned since he had been so energetically expelled by Appel. He must have been sure of finding Francine overwhelmed with grief, or he would not have dared to come at all. The poor woman gave no sign as she recognised her husband's evil counsellor, though an additional pallor overspread her cheeks. After giving a respectful bow, Claude closed the door, and advanced till he reached the middle of the room. As Francine did not speak, but instead looked at him with an inquiring gaze, he at last said:

'I have come on behalf of your husband, Mme. Dartigues, with a commission for you.'

She gave him a glance so scornful, that he became livid with anger.

'Did you not expect,' he added, 'that he would claim what belonged to him before leaving France?'

He imagined that Francine would show signs of weakness on hearing that Dartigues was bent on going, but no such signs were forthcoming. Furious at his defeat, he continued:

'I suppose you are aware of his determination?'

She did not even appear to feel the cruelty of his insistence on the fact, but asked in firm tones:

'What does he intend to claim?'

'His watch, which he has left behind, and a few papers and clothes.'

'He lies; he pawned his watch a fortnight ago, and has sold the pledge. He has no real need of his papers, and I shall keep them. With regard to his clothes, here they are.'

As she spoke, she drew a few handkerchiefs and shirts from a drawer, tied them in a napkin, placed the parcel on a chair within reach of Claude Brun, and said:

'That is all? Good-night!'

She turned her back to him, but the bank-clerk did not appear to relish so summary a dismissal.

With downcast eyes, he said:

'You do not care to know what Dartigues intends to do?'

'No.'

'Would you like to know the country to which he is going?'

'No.'

He tried once again:

'Is it because he has sent me that you will not ask any questions?'

This time Francine lost all patience; the blood rushed to her heart as, pale as death, she exclaimed:

'Take up that parcel, and leave the room. . . .'

'Ah, Mme. Dartigues,' he said, with contrite mien, 'you are doing wrong in sending me away in this fashion. In your own interest, in the interest of your child, you would do well to listen to me. All I ask is the opportunity of being of service to you.'

'I have no need of your help.'

'We should despise no one. If you understood the situation, you would certainly receive differently one who could do so much for you, and who would

ask for nothing in return. . . . Your husband is mad, he no longer knows what he is about. If I were to leave him to himself——'

The poor woman exclaimed with all the strength of her hatred:

'Would to God you had left him to himself! Had we never known you, we should never have been in the situation we now find ourselves in!'

'Not so loud,' he muttered. 'No one could tell what might happen with a madman like Dartigues. The chances are great that he die in the gutter! But he may succeed. There is no necessity to be so hard on him for a few innocent escapades. . . . If everybody were like you, I wonder what would become of the world! . . .'

'You surely do not imagine that I shall trouble about your opinion?'

'Oh, I am well aware that you are extremely prejudiced against me. I do my best to destroy these prejudices, but frankly, you give me not the slightest help. . . . To prove my loyalty, would you like me to tell you where Dartigues is waiting for me?'

A look of astonishment came into Francine's face.

'What interest have you in betraying him?'

'What interest! Why not goodwill? Come! Will you speak to him? You will find him at the café near the Place d'Anvers.'

'I will go there at once.'

'You do not wish me to go forward and inform him of this?'

'No.'

Francine cast a rapid glance around the room, and, as she saw the hundred-franc note Appel had left

on the mantelpiece, she blushed. With a sarcastic smile, Claude said :

'Take it with you ; you will find it necessary. Leave the child behind, he might inconvenience you.'

Without a word in reply, Francine took the parcel under her arm, placed the note in her pocket, and, taking Pierre by the hand, left the room. Claude followed her. She waited till he had begun to descend the stairs, then, proceeding along the corridor, she knocked at one of the neighbouring doors. Frêdéric Appel appeared on the threshold. Right at the end, under the solitary window, a table, covered with books and papers, was the first thing to strike the eye of the visitor. Giving her a look of uneasiness, he asked:

'Ah ! It is you ? What is the matter ?'

'I am obliged to leave the house for an hour. Will you take Pierre from me for so long ?'

'Certainly, but——'

'Pardon me, I cannot explain anything just now. Later you shall know all. I am in a hurry. . . .'

Pushing the child towards Appel, who received him with a smile, she descended the stairs. She reflected :

'If only this wretch had not run off to warn Dartigues . . . I dare not think what trick they may be capable of playing me. . . .'

She mounted the Rue Turgot as fast as she could. Claude Brun was in front of her. On reaching the Avenue Trudaine he turned to the left. So this time he had told her the truth ; he had not intended to deceive her. Crossing the square through a crowd of children playing in the sand, she made her way

in the direction of a little café she knew only too well, from having gone there on repeated occasions to bring Dartigues home after a night spent at cards. Just now the establishment was empty. From the outside she could see the dreamer seated in front of a glass of absinthe.

He was leaning on the marble slab of the table, with a far-away look in his eyes. His still handsome countenance now wore a look of lassitude. What was he thinking of? The resolution he was about to make was a very serious one, and would take him far from his country, among strange people whose language and customs he was entirely ignorant of. Was he thinking of his wife and child? Was it not rather of this fortune he was continually in pursuit of, without ever succeeding in seizing it?

Francine, with beating heart, tried to guess the thoughts of this man whom she was resolved to make a final effort to restrain. In spite of all her efforts, however, she could no longer read that face which had so often deceived her. She knew he was false; all her confidence had vanished. Pushing open the door, she entered. The waiter, who had approached to take a new order, seeing who had entered, discreetly withdrew. Dartigues frowned, though he did not appear astonished. He moved a little, but Francine took a seat in front of her husband.

'I might have suspected that Claude would tell you where I was,' he said calmly, 'but he was the only one I could send.'

'Your envoy was worthy of his mission. So you have determined to leave us?'

'I am not leaving you. Who has spoken of such

a thing? I am simply going far away to hunt for the fortune I cannot find here. I have given you an opportunity to come with me, but you refuse.'

'Had you imagined I would have done otherwise, you would never have made me the offer. You are going to your ruin, that is the reason I will not go with you. It is not that I am afraid of suffering or ill-luck; that I have long endured. I had hoped some remnant of pity would be left for your wife and son, such as would dissuade you from committing this supreme folly. Surely you have never seen a ship full of emigrants, otherwise you would never think of leaving your native land. I have still before my eyes the spectacle I once saw on a trip to Havre with my father. . . . The wretches, huddled close together, and tightly clasping the hands of their children, showed plainly enough on their troubled faces how anxious they were regarding the step they had taken; the thought of the unknown future filled them with anguish. They were as resolute as you are, they had lent willing ears to the evil counsels you have listened to; and dreamt of a new country, which would be much more favourable for development, as though there could ever be any land to compare with the country in which one is born, and as though poverty and misfortune were not the lot of the improvident in every clime? You have not seen them leave for lands far away across the ocean, sad-eyed, haggard men, discouraged with all the efforts they had made, starting off for a soil where everything grows without effort, and where diamonds and gold are as plentiful as pebbles on the roadside. Again, have you ever seen them return? More ragged and poverty-stricken than when they started, devoid now of even that vague,

hopeful smile which formerly illumined their countenances. The luckiest return home, the others die abroad, in abandoned helplessness, beneath the indifferent or hostile eye of strangers. They return, I say, but their energy is broken. What is to become of them? What will they do? Where will they go? Entering into the life of the people, they disappear in the slums; these unfortunates who have thus made shipwreck of life will never again be seen elsewhere than in night-shelters and workhouses, until they finally enter a pauper's grave. Don't think I am trying to terrify you, for the picture I am painting for you is no approach to the reality. Just think where you started from, and reflect on where you are going. Though an intelligent workman, you have lost every position you held, through lack of fixity in ideas. And now you have stopped working altogether, imagining that your ambitious dreams will be crowned by mere chance. In this low café you waste your time and opportunities driving your brain into a fever of delirium by the poison you are drinking. What I am now saying I have long reflected over, postponing this moment to the very last, as I ever hoped you would change, for I cannot believe that you are thoroughly unworthy. You have listened to evil counsels, but what you have just heard is uttered by one who has no interest in your ruin. There is still time to retrace your steps; if you will work, you will find me ready to undergo every sacrifice. But if you allow yourself to be led into this folly, then, I no longer know you; all is at an end between us. You shall be as dead to your child and wife, for you will have abandoned us, and such an abandonment is the most cowardly act a man could commit.'

Panting with emotion, and trembling with the effort she had made, she ceased speaking. Her eyes were bathed in tears, but she remained firm in her resolution. He, impassive, had offered no interruption, and seemed resigned to submit to the avalanche of reproaches now being poured upon him. When she had come to an end, he raised his head, and said quietly :

'Have you finished? You cannot accuse me of having cut you short. Now it is my turn, for you surely cannot think you have either convinced me by your arguments or terrified me by your evil omens. All such ideas and loose reasonings are very good for children, but I know what I am doing. This time, the enterprise I am engaged on is certain to succeed. No capital is needed, and capital is the very thing I have hitherto always lacked. Ah! if I had had money! . . .'

She interrupted him abruptly :

'You would have squandered it, just as you spent all our own money.'

'Had I been in control of sufficient capital, I should at this moment be at the head of a prosperous industry, which would bring in millions,' he continued, in authoritative tones. 'I would have offered violence to fortune as others have done. As there was no spring-board, however, I could not take the leap. . . . Credit can be replaced by nothing else. . . . It is the source of all wealth, and I have never had sufficient credit to work on for a single year. . . . This time, capital is of no use ; one needs simply be bold and vigorous, and willing to risk one's skin. That I am quite ready to do. The person who is to procure me the initial funds is unable, himself, to take advantage of the situation. That is why he mentioned the matter to me. For some

years I shall have to be a buccaneer, selling the skins of wild bulls, and exporting tinned meat.'

'I know what that means; and you think they have been waiting for you to risk such a speculation? All you could do would be to pick up the remnants left behind by the Americans who have been engaged in this industry for years. Your friend from Havre is a landed proprietor, who is willing to give you the management of his property, though he knows perfectly well that, if you stay there, you will live in poverty in a wilderness of a country, and surrounded by savages of every description.'

'Admitting you are right,' said Dartigues, with a smile full of confidence, 'do you think that once I had a footing in this new country I should be unable to make my way? . . . In those immense tracts of land where there exists nothing but natural riches, waiting to be exploited, great sources of wealth are to be found. With the money I shall earn in this enterprise, I shall be able to find something else. . . .'

'Something else! Always something else!' exclaimed Francine. 'There is the key to your failure. Something else than your country, your trade, your family. The unknown; the intoxication of plunging into some dark abyss at the bottom of which no one can tell what there is. . . .'

'There is gold! I tell you, unprecedented fortunes. That is the country where bootblacks end their days as millionaires. A former boatman becomes the most powerful ship-owner in the new world. A pork-merchant shovels up money in the mines just as children shovel up sand in the public squares. A new country where there is nothing tariffed or codified, in which

vital energy may be developed at leisure, and no other claim is demanded of a man than that he be intelligent and possessed of a certain initiative. In this ignoble Europe of ours, which is dying of comfort, egoism and pusillanimity, there is nothing more to be done. No one here is willing to risk a hundred thousand francs, unless he is certain, beforehand, to receive four per cent. for his money at the year's end. A land of respectable retired persons, and of pleasure-seekers, which disgusts me, and which I intend to quit, for I should die here in wretched poverty; though I intend to return to it, rich and powerful, to trample it under foot, and hear it thank me for such treatment!'

A sombre ray of light lit up his face as he thus spoke. His upturned eyes seemed to see the scenes he described, whilst a bitter smile appeared on his lips. Dashing his hand violently on the table, he took up his glass of absinthe, and emptied it at a single draught. His face again turned pallid, though his agitation in no way diminished.

'A man with such ideas in his head,' said Francine, 'remains unmarried; he does not take upon himself the charge of a wife and child. An adventurer ought to be free!'

'That is the reason I am leaving France!' he exclaimed.

'Then you abandon us?'

'I shall not forget you. You shall be the first to share my gains.'

'It is not your money I want. Don't you understand me? Or has your heart become so dead that my prayers no longer touch you? I am your wife, you are the father of my child; for whom I have left

everything; I have rights over you which I ought to enforce. You will be committing a crime if you leave us in this way. If you go away, we have nothing further to hope for. The best that can happen to you will be to find poverty and misery where you expect wealth and abundance. And what will become of us in the meantime? Come, think over the matter and become master of yourself once again. A little courage and good conduct, and in a few weeks we shall be again on our feet. I am not an ambitious woman, and only ask to be permitted to live quietly from day to day, with my husband and child. You could find work at once if you would do it. Meanwhile, I will take everything upon myself. . . . But in the name of whatever you hold most sacred, do not leave us. You were fond of Pierre and myself before these recent escapades of yours. The little one is growing up full of promise for the future. . . . Come, now, make up your mind to be a good and honest man, that is far better than being rich. Turn a deaf ear to dangerous and interested advice; and do not blind yourself and wander from the straight path, where alone is safety and happiness.'

He appeared to have heard only the last words uttered by Francine, and replied in husky tones:

'Safety is abroad, and happiness does not exist without wealth!'

'Say rather that happiness consists in the liberty to dare all. Once more, for the last time, will you do your duty and remain with me?'

'No! Here I should be ruined!'

'Then listen; I will never forgive you for such abominable conduct. Everything you have done hitherto I have endured without a word. You have

reduced me to abject poverty, and I have worked as well as I could; you return home only to recover from the effects of a drunken debauch, and to rob me. And yet I would still endure all, for you are my husband, the father of my child, the one whose name we bear. But if you continue such infamous conduct by leaving us in despair and desolation whilst you are free to do as you please, without the slightest remorse or care . . . ah! become whatever you like, live in wealth or starve in a garret, return as a beggar or die in the gutter, I shall know you no more, for you will have sunk to the level of the most cowardly and unnatural man living.'

His eyes flaming, he leapt to his feet, and, his hand upraised, exclaimed:

'Enough! Not another word!'

'Strike me! Wretch! You could not sink lower than that!'

Trembling and pallid, he regained possession of himself.

'I must go away! If not, I shall commit some folly or other!'

Mechanically he thrust his hand into his pocket, to pay for his drink, and, finding it empty, a look of disappointment came into his face. Then Francine, with a smile of disdain, took the hundred-franc note, and flinging it on the table, said:

'No one will ever be able to deny that I paid for you right to the end.'

As Dartigues gave her a look of surprise, she added:

'Keep the change. Then, at any rate, you will not be forced to rob someone before leaving!'

For the last time she looked at him, and seeing in

the hardened lines of his countenance the firm determination not to yield to reason, she gave a profound sigh and uttered the terrible words :

'Good-bye for ever !'

Then, with firm step, she left the café, leaving behind all the hopes and beliefs life had given her.

Appel, left in his little room with Pierre, had seated the child on a stool, with an old book of prints and engravings on his knee. He explained the different characters, and described the various scenes, with amused patience. The child gravely listened, already giving proof of a keen intelligence in the questions he asked from time to time. A rapid step along the passage caused him to raise his head. Leaping from his stool, he said :

'Mamma has come back. . . .'

'Very well ! Run and open the door. . . .'

The child immediately sprang forward, and Francine appeared on the threshold, her face distorted with grief. She was out of breath quite as much from the beating of her grief-laden heart as from the rapidity of her walk. Seizing Pierre, she clasped him to her breast without a word, then she sat down, motionless and dumb, her head in her hand, the very picture of desolation.

'*Mon dieu !* What is the matter ?' asked the young doctor.

Francine gave him a despairing look, and, holding her child still tightly clasped in her arms, said :

'I have no longer a husband, and this poor little one has no longer a father.'

'Ah ! Dartigues . . .'

'Oh, give yourself no uneasiness ; he is not dead ; he

has only abandoned Pierre and myself. Poverty weighs heavily on him, and work disgusts him. He wishes to attempt a career which turns a man into either a brigand or a millionaire, often both! . . . He thinks nothing of us; his motto is: Each for himself. We shall escape from these difficulties if we can, but if not, he will be far away. This is what my life has come to! Were I not a Christian woman of courage, all that would remain for me to do would be to fill my stove with charcoal, stuff up the chimney, and take refuge in death, with my little one here, just as those poor wretches do who are tired of struggling and . . .'

Appel gave a gesture of sorrowful protest.

'You forget that you are not alone, that you still have a father . . . a friend. . . .'

'My father, and yourself, yes, that is true, and it is wrong of me to speak so. What right has one to give way to despair, when one can rely on love and affection which are sincere?'

'Are you certain,' continued Appel, 'that the resolution M. Dartigues has come to is irrevocable? He may have spoken to you in a moment of excitement, under the influence of some grief which will fall. . . .'

'No! I know him only too well; his mind is made up. Besides, taking everything into consideration, it is perhaps better that things should be so. In the depths of my husband's soul there is nothing but vanity and ambition. At this very moment, he is capable of committing a crime if it would bring him success. He no longer possesses the necessary energy and patience to overcome the obstacles presented by any enterprise whatever, but can only act in sudden strokes as gamblers do. If he wins, he will realize his dreams,

for no scruples will stop him, once he has sufficient capital in his hands. He has come to the point at which an adventurer of his type has as many chances of being brought to prison or the gallows as to the highest fortunes and honours. I hope it will not be his fate to suffer too acutely; that is the kindest wish I can send him, in the state of dejection in which I now find myself.'

As she uttered these final words, she burst into tears. Appel respected, by his silence, the young woman's grief. He addressed her no commonplace words of consolation or useless encouragement, for he knew how sincere was her trouble, and that nothing besides time and the daily necessities of life could diminish it. After a few moments, seeing that she had somewhat recovered her calm, he said:

'What plans have you formed? You are possessed of too much strength of character to remain stunned before such a situation.'

'I am thinking of writing to my father; that is my first duty. If he wishes me to return home, I will do so. He is very fond of me, and could not bear the thought of my being abandoned. The only obstacle existing between his fondness for me and my ill-fortune was Dartigues. I shall once more become his child, and have no apprehension for the future, for he is in comfortable circumstances, and my material needs will be well provided for.'

'Then you will leave Paris?' asked Appel sadly. 'And I shall see nothing more of you? You will forget that you had a friend here, whose poverty was as great as your own, but who felt happy in the thought that you were by his side. I shall have to renounce

the pleasure of meeting you from time to time. . . . When you are gone, I shall be quite alone. . . .'

'Who knows? Perhaps my father will be willing to leave Rouen. It may seem to him too painful to see me return home, poor and abandoned, in the presence of all those who knew me in the old days. I will do all I can to induce him to come to Paris. And then, M. Appel, you will make the acquaintance of one who also will love you, and interest himself keenly in your success.'

Appel smiled and shook his head pensively.

'What plans we are forming!' he said. 'In the midst of tears and troubles, on the very brink of the grave, man has such need of hope, that even then he gives way to illusions and dreams! Perhaps, you see, it is this which must count as a final excuse for your wretched husband, who is starting in pursuit of a chimera.'

Francine said nothing in reply to this generous explanation, but, taking Pierre by the hand, she said:

'Come along, darling; we must go home now. . . .'

The child puckered up his brows, as he poutingly asked:

'Why cannot we always stay with M. Appel, mamma? . . .'

'Because M. Appel has work to do, which necessitates his being alone and undisturbed. . . . Say you thank him for all his kindness, and give him a good kiss.'

Appel took up Pierre in his arms, and as the little one's tender lips came in contact with his face, he saw Francine blush, as though it were the mother who was bestowing the child's kiss.

PART THE SECOND

CHAPTER III

A CLOUD of dust arose in the limpid air as the measured trot . . . trot . . . of the horses' hoofs resounded on the pine-shaded roadway leading to the outer gate of the château.

'There they are! There they are!' was shouted in panting tones.

'Out of the way!' exclaimed a stout man who held a firebrand in his hand.

At that moment, a landau, followed by a carriage laden with luggage, appeared at the bend of the road. The stout man, who was Mayor of Maillane, applied his light to a cast-iron tube, and immediately after a bombshell ascended on high, accompanied by a terrific crash. A flourish of trumpets burst into sound, saluting the arrival of the master, the return to his domain. The landau had come to a stop. Its occupants were a finely-shaped, gray-haired man, a very dark-complexioned woman, still young, of a Spanish type of beauty, whilst the front seat was occupied by a charming young lady.

'A thousand thanks, M, le Maire, for your welcome; my sincere gratitude for your touching

sympathy, my friends,' said the traveller in a strong voice. 'You receive me like a prince, though I am only an ordinary citizen, one of yourselves. . . . Do me the favour to follow us to the château; there we shall be very pleased to receive you.'

A warm hurrah greeted these words. The landau again started off, crossing a fine park, and came to a halt in front of the perron of a vast structure which the inhabitants of the neighbourhood had designated under the name of the château. On the perron stood three men, just arrived from Paris; they descended the steps, and the most eager of the three opened the carriage-door, offering the ladies his arm as they alighted.

'Ha, Claude! how are you?' exclaimed the traveller, standing upright in the carriage, and giving the other a friendly tap on the shoulder.

'Have you had a pleasant voyage?' asked the other, without replying. 'The sea has not been too rough?'

'Beautiful! Smooth as oil, my dear M. Brun,' said the dark-complexioned lady, as she sprang to the ground. 'My daughter Bella has not been sick in the slightest, and M. de Maillane has had no occasion to regret having brought us with him. . . .'

She mounted the steps, followed by her husband and daughter. Halting before the two other men, who had remained waiting at the hall-door, she said:

'How kind of you to meet us, gentlemen!'

A series of handshakes were exchanged; M. de Maillane, in tones of jovial cordiality, exclaimed:

'Nothing fresh on 'Change, Rémançon? And how are you, my dear Barandet? Come inside. You, my dear Brun, seem devoted to my wife and step-daughter.'

They passed into the salon, where luncheon had been served. The mayor and his satellites followed, carefully gliding along the highly-polished floor.

'Give the bandsmen and all who have come with them something to drink. . . . Show them all into the conservatory, and give them whatever they wish. . . .'

'I will see to the fulfilment of your orders,' said Claude Brun, who appeared quite at home.

Rémançon and Barandet were standing with their backs to the fireplace, scrutinizing curiously the mixed company assembled in the drawing-room of the château of Maillane. The latter was a small man, with gray hair of ecclesiastical cut, smooth chin, and the dull, lifeless eyes of one in the habit of concealing his thoughts. Rémançon was a bald-headed man, of florid complexion, hypocritical lips, and was dressed in the height of fashion.

'Have a barrel of wine rolled into the court-yard, and let everybody drink my health,' said the castellan of Maillane in jovial accents. 'M. le Maire, accept a glass of champagne in honour of the Republic. . . .'

Eager servants were preparing a lunch to which the travellers were already doing ample justice. Corks were flying about, and the bottles plunged into buckets filled with ice were foaming around their silver-topped necks.

'The works of the port of Gabès are progressing?' asked the mayor, with an obsequious smile.

'Everything is going along first-rate, M. le Maire. The Government will be in a position to inaugurate next year the port they thought it would be impossible

to complete within a couple of years. . . . We have performed a real miracle. . . .'

'That is what you are in the habit of doing, my dear Maillane,' said Barandet in solemn tones. 'The wonderful deeds you have accomplished in America were a guarantee as to the success of your enterprises in Europe. Your shareholders are very fortunate individuals! . . . And it is to you they will owe their fortunes. . . . The State, too, will not forget your efforts in assuring for France a solid basis of operations in the Mediterranean.'

'Good, my dear Barandet, but we must not expect any reward from the Government. I undertook this work in the public interest. . . . This port of Gabès, with its arsenal, its mole and its fortresses, will be a magnificent creation, capable of sheltering an entire fleet. Once we have Bizerte and Gabès armed, we may be said to be masters of the sea. . . .'

'And it is to you that this advantage will be due!' exclaimed Rémançon. 'This fact cannot be too often repeated. The electors of Maillane are well aware of it, and they intend to send you to the House, where your glorious ideas of commercial progress will have a splendid triumph. In France, there is room for great progress. . . . A canal uniting the Durance with Berre, a railroad passing along Maillane to Nîmes, would prove a source of inexhaustible wealth to local industries. . . .'

'Ah! We have been waiting for years for the realization of these plans,' said the mayor.

'Well, you will not have long to wait now,' exclaimed M. de Maillane. 'Plans for these two gigantic schemes are being investigated. And let me tell you,

that investigation with me is equivalent to execution. . . . Modern industry, backed by the huge capital of subscribers, is capable of performing miracles, as, for instance, the metamorphosis of the Crau, by irrigating it with fertilizing waters, and increasing by a hundredfold the value of the waste land all around Maillane, by cutting a railway and thus bringing about facilities of culture, which have hitherto been lacking. . . .'

All listened in admiring silence to the speaker's convincing and persuasive words. Realization seemed so easy, and so near at hand, as they listened, that the owners of this barren land, and the proprietors of the banks of the Crau, already imagined themselves rolling in wealth. The railroad was already in working order, the waters already circulating the fertilizing mud in the midst of deserted stones, and the man continued, his eyes shining under the intoxication of his own dreams. Claude Brun slipped quietly behind M. de Maillane, and in jesting tones whispered in his ear :

' Always the same ! Right to your last breath you will be full of the plans you have formed, I suppose. What have all the lessons of the past taught you ? Will you never learn to be calm and collected ?'

M. de Maillane smiled, and, leaning over towards his friend, said :

' Why should I restrain myself ? Cannot I follow the bent of my own nature, now that I have no further deceptions to fear, since all I undertake succeeds ? The hour of gloom is past, good fortune has come at last, the ransom of evil days. Now that I am old, do not reproach me with having preserved my youthful

habits. It is this perfectly sincere ardour of mine which reacts on the minds of others and gives me success. My enthusiasm, surviving as it has done so many trials, is the sole secret of my strength. I may be a dreamer, but I realize my dreams, and that is the important point!'

'Yes,' said Claude Brun, with a shrug of the shoulders, 'you are M. de Maillane, a powerful and wealthy business man, of infinite resource, an officer of the Legion of Honour, and on the point of becoming a deputy. But you are none the less Dartigues, one who throws powder in people's eyes, and blinds himself at the same time. Take care; it is more difficult to remain in a lofty position than to attain to it. Keep a certain reserve in your promises, and do not promise what you know you cannot fulfil. We are not in South America now, where time, audacity, and money are all-powerful. France is a country in which preciseness and accuracy hold sovereign sway; words here have their exact value, promises are depended on in proportion as they are realized. That you know only too well, for a long time was needed before success came. Don't give yourself away; look at Barandet and Rémançon; they listen to what you say, but themselves maintain a cautious silence. All they care about is to take advantage of your exuberance, they will give you all the trouble and responsibility, and will take for themselves all the profit.'

'You are right, Brun. But do you think I can make myself over again? You must take me just as I am with all my qualities and defects. True, I may be overenthusiastic, but then I am a born leader

of men. What we must do now is to enter upon a strong electoral propagandism. It is rather strange advice you are giving me, not to make any promises, when our object is to capture as many electors as possible! Now or never is the time to beat the big drum!'

M. de Maillane left his friend, and returned to the municipal party standing close by. The mayor was engaged in conversation with Barandet and Rémançon; the former told him of his political plans, whilst the latter exposed before his eyes a whole crowd of financial conceptions which caused the simple-minded man to imagine that a stream of gold was on the point of springing up beneath his very feet. The confidence of the Maillane electors increased continually, whilst the presence of the ladies, the mother and daughter dressed in the most elegant fashion, completed the impression of comfort and ease felt by all present. This sensation was produced by the free benevolent manners of the master, who captivated his listeners, as he had captivated his own mind all his life long. After twenty years, now that everything prospered to which he laid his hand, he was still the same Dartigues as in the days of poverty and misfortune.

'We must not trespass on your gracious hospitality, M. de Maillane,' said the mayor. 'After your long voyage, you must all feel the need of rest and quiet. . . . But we shall meet again. . . .'

'To-morrow, M. le Maire—to-morrow without fail. Then we will begin the campaign at once.'

The town council, preceding the mayor, was already on the perron. The courtyard offered the spectacle of an improvised country fair. On stone seats, under

the shade of magnificent sycamores, sat the country folk, drinking and smoking, whilst on the sand, in the full heat of the sun, a farandola was taking place to the music, in turn rumbling and sonorous, of a drum and a flute. Gay shouts and songs resounded everywhere, as though these people of the South could not understand amusement at all unless accompanied by noise and movement. The Maillane family and their guests remained for some time looking down from the terrace on the animated spectacle. Finally the drum and flute ceased playing, and the people gradually withdrew. The songs died away in the distance, and the courtyard was again silent.

Since his flight from Paris and France, Dartigues' life had been one uninterrupted succession of astonishing adventures. He had not become M. de Maillane as the result of an inheritance placing in his hands a domain whose name he had only to take upon himself, with the same ease as he touched its revenues. Years of difficulty and effort had followed without his seeing the faintest realization of his hopes. At first the farm in America, which really existed, had for several months occupied his whole time and energy. He had succeeded in breeding horses with the money received from the sale of his oxen, but the speculation, at first advantageous enough, had turned out badly by reason of prohibitive taxes which had cut short the sale with North America.

Tired of galloping over the savannas to inspect his farms, Dartigues, pining for town life, had broken his contract with the Havre merchant, and, possessed of a few thousand piastres, he now journeyed to Santa-Fé, where Claude Brun was managing a commission

agency. With his easy and grandiose manner of regarding everything on a large scale, Dartigues had wished to expand the business, and give larger credits to the customers. In a few months he had ruined the business, and Brun and Dartigues next found themselves directors of a music-hall in Philadelphia, where niggers danced and played the banjo, or pretty quadroon-girls served cocktails in the large hall.

With the profits of their theatrical season they undertook the business of transporting to Europe San Francisco meat in frigorific vessels. This was speedily developing into a prosperous affair, when Claude Brun, through an unlucky speculation in corn, threw the two partners lower than they had ever yet fallen. Finally, at Valdivia, after six years' wanderings, Dartigues met Mme. Hermandez, widow of the General, former President of Gautemala, was favourably received by her, and obtained her hand in marriage.

From this moment Dartigues' fortune turned; everything he undertook prospered. The adventurer had troubled little about his first marriage, as he had never thought of returning to France, and had married Mme. Hermandez simply according to American law. Everything Dartigues touched seemed to turn into gold. Brun would say to him at times :

'You have discovered the secret of the alchemists of the Middle Ages. You place centimes into a box, they become changed into guineas and doubloons.'

Dartigues, relying on the fortune of Mme. Hermandez, whose first husband had not administered the finances of the State for a long number of years without considerable success, had felt a new assurance

spring up within him. He had tendered for the Parana railroad contract, and summoned from Europe engineers, machines, and workmen, pushing forward this enormous enterprise with feverish activity. In four years he had earned a colossal fortune, and, by the commercial and industrial penetration this new affair opened out to his countrymen, had interested the French Government in countries hitherto wholly subjected to foreign influence.

Claude Brun, with great astuteness, had returned to France, where he had proclaimed aloud Dartigues' merits, explained the political advantages the taking possession by French agents of the Parana line offered, shown the possible resumption of the Panama Canal affair by man of Dartigues' intelligence, and, consequently, the capital partly saved and placed on a good footing as the result of the enterprise. Favourably received, Claude Brun had returned to America with the Cross of the Legion of Honour for Dartigues, and a nomination as Consul General for himself.

Accordingly the two friends saw themselves on the way to become very rich and highly esteemed. Meanwhile, they lived the lives of nabobs, in those lands where the prestige of rank and wealth is such that a poor man is hanged for a paltry theft, whilst a rich man is appointed governor of a province for a vast and productive freebooting expedition. Dartigues' conscience had readily accommodated itself to these unjust conditions, and he had adopted the habit of looking upon everything which did not entail disastrous consequences as perfectly legitimate. He regarded it as quite natural to pay the magistrates before whom he had to reply for his actions, as well as all with

whom it was to his interest, either officially or officiously, to be on good terms. He had raised corruption to the dignity of a principle, and found it so easy to pay for everything, that he did not believe there was anything in the world without its price.

He was full of courtesy and tenderness for his wife and step-daughter Bella, a charming brunette, fifteen years of age. During the whole of his stay in America he had not made the slightest allusion to his family, which he had so shamefully abandoned, except once, and on this occasion Claude Brun's reply had been of so peremptory a nature that he had never again mentioned Francine and little Pierre. The occasion alluded to was one evening in Philadelphia, in the days of their most abject poverty. Seated drinking whisky in a miserable tavern, in the midst of a crowd of Irish and German emigrants, they were listening, dejected and hopeless, to the conversation carried on about them in languages they could not understand. Everything concurred to make them feel the more keenly their distress and loneliness. After a moment's silence, Dartigues gave utterance to a blasphemous imprecation. Claude remained impassive and mute, whereupon Dartigues said:

'Are you devoid of all feeling? Are you inaccessible to sorrow and discouragement, even to regret?'

'Regret of what?' asked Brun coldly. 'The money we have lost all through your fault? The comfort we had finally obtained, and the probable security of our existence? Is that what you regret?'

'No! What I am sorry for is that I listened to you, and left Paris and France for this immense

continent, where I feel myself as though drowned in the midst of a human ocean. What made me follow you? I should have been quiet and happy. . . .'

'And disgusted with your quiet little home, for it is by no means certain that you would have had even that. . . . Doubtless, you would have finally been turned out of doors by your wife——'

'Not another word on that subject!' exclaimed Dartigues. 'You hated her, and it was because you thought it would injure her that you dragged me after you. . . . I have acted shamefully towards her, for she was kind and devoted to me. . . .'

'Ah, you think so? This kind and devoted creature you seem to regret so much now that you are without a farthing would be sure, when she saw you leave France, to give a sigh of satisfaction. You were not the right man for her, my poor Dartigues; of that she was quite conscious. Don't trouble yourself with remorse; you were quite right to leave her, and you would certainly be in the way were you to return. Think no more of what you have left behind; you have made a clear cut in your life, now you must see what the future has in store.'

Dartigues gave no reply. He drowned his sorrow in drink, and from that moment the very name of Francine appeared to be effaced from his memory, for he never uttered it. Did he ever think of those he had left behind? Considering his fickleness of disposition, very probably he did not. With him the thought of what the future would bring drove away all idea of the past. In his seething brain impressions had no time to last. This was alike his misfortune and his salvation, for had he had leisure to think of

what he had already done in life, he might have felt moved to the very depths of his being. He thought of nothing but his plans, however, and followed Claude's advice to keep his eyes fixed on the future.

What he had left behind no longer counted. His wife's tears, the privations of his child, and the abandoned household . . . all was past, and quite naturally he forgot it, for it cost him no effort to efface the mental picture the thought of them summoned up. The moral sense of the unfortunate man, already considerably dulled by his irregular life in France, lost all power in the struggle he maintained to reach success. He reached the point of considering nothing but results; the means by which they were obtained were indifferent to him. Opportunity and self-interest were henceforward his only principles of life.

He had met Mme. Hermandez at Valdivia, when investigating an affair which was to lead to the Parana railroad enterprise. Thinking the President's widow might be useful to him, by reason of the influence she could dispose of, and seeing her embarrassed by the management of a fortune considerably complicated, he offered his advice, and rendered Mme. Hermandez such important services that she looked upon their separation and his departure as a disaster. Dartigues immediately understood the situation, and profited by it. He gave the widow to understand that he could not remain without compromising her and neglecting his own affairs. He offered marriage as a suitable arrangement, and, without the slightest scruple, led Mme. Hermandez to the altar.

From this time he entered into relations with Rémauçon and Barandet. The former had been

involved in the immense crash of the Société Européenne, which, formed with a capital of fifty million francs, had increased tenfold the value of its shares by a desperate system of stock-jobbing, and had, in consequence of colossal speculations in Texas mines, fallen into utter ruin. Barandet, former Prefect, State Counsellor, and Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour, had acquired the reputation of a remarkable administrator in the liquidation of the Société Européenne. He had prolonged the auditing of accounts over six years, and when at last everything had been examined and checked, the whole had been swallowed, and there remained nothing but a wonderfully clear financial statement, showing how the money had been spent, but leaving not a farthing to the shareholders.

These men thoroughly understood one another. Rémançon and Barandet alike had profited by the liquidation of the Société Européenne; they entered into communication with Dartigues, who needed correspondents in Europe, and from the very first recognised in him one of themselves. Claude Brun came to Paris to discuss with the two financiers concerning the capital necessary to float the Parana affair. An understanding was immediately arrived at. Rémançon and Barandet were experts in the art of inflating financial bubbles, whilst Dartigues easily inspired confidence in the shareholders. The Parana railroad, commenced with only a moderate capital, was pushed feverishly forward, finished in the stipulated time, and, wonderful to relate, turned out successful.

Only one discordant note broke the harmony of

praise showered on the Dartigues syndicate, and this was raised by the French Consul at San Paulo, M. Ramon, a very honest and intelligent merchant, who had had confidence in the future of the enterprise, in which he had sunk a considerable sum of money. He had undertaken to improve the methods of the builders, but his interference, which might have become troublesome, had been cleverly nullified by Claude Brun, who had judged that the best means of paralyzing his opposition would be to include him as one of the Board of Directors.

There, circumvented by Dartigues, the Consul found himself incapable of reacting, though he never for a moment ceased his protests. With a cynicism daily increased by a feeling of security, Dartigues and his colleagues took no pains to conceal from the Consul the jobbery and intrigues they employed in the prosecution of their work. Horror-struck, though incapable of overcoming such wily opponents, without risking the ruin of the whole undertaking by his revelations, Ramon decided to retire from the Board, though, convinced that the speculation would become productive, he refused to sell his founder's shares to Claude Brun. He abandoned the idea of preventing his partners from stealing, the result being that Dartigues came out of the Parana undertaking with illicit gains to the extent of four million francs, and an interest in the company which, once in full working order, would bring him in a magnificent income.

It was about this time that Dartigues was first attacked with home-sickness. The adventurer who had roamed all over the New World suddenly felt a feeling of sadness come over him at having nothing

to which he could attach himself. For years he had lived in garrets, but just now he inhabited a magnificent palace, along with his wife and step-daughter.

At times he would think of the little cottage in the Rue des Charettes, in which he had passed the quietest and purest months of his life. His memory began to dwell on those old Norman dwellings, and his past life now seemed like an oasis in the midst of the burning desert of his present existence. Sentimentality, however, was not Dartigues' darling sin, and the man of practical business life quickly reappeared to put in order these poetical and dreamy fancies.

All the same, he became aware that earning money was not everything, and that perhaps he would some day have to think of enjoying it. He wondered how he would spend his income in such a way as to obtain from it the greatest possible pleasure, and found himself obliged to confess that South America might be a fine place for Europeans who thought of nothing else than enriching themselves, but that, once this result accomplished, the only thing to do was to embark for Europe, where alone one could spend one's fortune in the most agreeable manner.

Speaking on the matter to Mme. Dartigues, he found that her ideas were identical with his own. The President's widow felt nothing but scorn for the race from which she had sprung, and was certain that Paris was the only place in the world where wealth would be rightly appreciated. Mlle. Bella Hermandez was at that time sixteen years of age, an extremely ravishing señorita, and one of the richest heiresses of Brazil ; she gave an enthusiastic welcome to her stepfather's proposition. Accordingly a rapid

trans-Atlantic steamer, which had very little in common with the slow, filthy-looking coaster in which the wretched Dartigues had crossed to America, now brought him back, a millionaire, to Europe.

Claude Brun had preceded him by a few weeks. This sagacious individual had not forgotten that his friend's return to France might offer a certain element of danger. Reaching Paris, he set the police at work to discover whatever of importance there might be to learn concerning Francine. In spite of his persevering activity, however, he found himself checked in every direction. After living at Rouen for a year with her father, Mme. Dartigues had returned to Paris, where she had started a linen-draper's shop, which quickly became very prosperous. About this time she had applied for and obtained her divorce; the shop had subsequently been abandoned, and there the chain of investigation broke.

Four years after Dartigues' departure not a single trace could be found of Francine or her little boy, who must then be eight years of age. Was she dead? Had she again left Paris? Had she married a second time? No reply could be found to any of these questions. The police abruptly refused to continue their investigations, and Brun imagined they must have received superior orders to abandon any further attempt to hunt out Francine. After all, the most important point was to learn that Dartigues, in returning to France, ran no risk of causing trouble between his former and his present wife.

Disembarking at Marseilles, Dartigues saw once more, with intense delight, the land of his childhood. Chance took him to Maillane; the domain was for

sale, so he bought it, and spent the winter months in a peace he had never hitherto known. For the first time in his life he enjoyed his present lot, without any feverish worry concerning the future. Then Brun and Rémançon suddenly called on him with plans of the works at the harbour of Gabès, and the whirl of business life again took possession of Dartigues. Anxious to efface whatever offered the faintest allusion to his past life, he adopted the name of Maillane. The idea was Brun's; it pleased the President's widow, for whom the satisfaction of vanity was not void of importance. Very soon Dartigues completely disappeared, and in business matters, and the world at large, M. de Maillane occupied the first rank.

It was so easy for him to deceive himself as well as others that he was one of the first to forget that he had ever been called Dartigues. Adopting the airs of a nobleman, he led a more refined life, and took up clerical opinions.

Scorn for the common herd of men had come to him along with his increase of fortune, and, after living in the slums of San Francisco, in the midst of drunken sailors and gold-diggers, he affected to treat human misery in very summary fashion. Barandet, a skilful director of the parvenu's ideas, had led him to favour an opportunism which was very productive in so far as it permitted him not to break with those in power, whilst at the same time it rendered possible an alliance with the reactionaries.

After the reception of Dartigues at the château, the three friends met in the study. The host took a seat, and offering his cigar-case to his friends, said:

'Well, now that we are alone, what is there fresh going on?'

'A great deal,' said Barandet, in solemn tones. 'In the first place, I must tell you that the fight against your rival in the Maillane district is being vigorously waged. It will be of far greater importance than an ordinary provincial election generally is. We must not lose sight of the fact that Des Barres is a kind of apostle whose disinterestedness and purity of intentions are universally acknowledged. It will accordingly be useless to attack him from a moral standpoint. Calumny is the surest weapon one can use for defeating an opponent, but Des Barres possesses an armour of diamond from which the keenest darts fall harmless. Only from the revolutionary point of view is he subject to attack, and on this he has a very strong programme. So, you see, he is a powerful and dangerous enemy. Besides, he has at his back the whole of the Socialist press, and the campaign has already begun in Paris. As you are aware, Des Barres has sent in his resignation as member for Valenciennes, so as to allow Jean Pecqueur, the leader of the Socialist party, to return to the House. Consequently the Maillane district will be the field on which the two parties now aiming for supremacy in the Government will do battle. . . .'

'Still, you have one signal advantage,' interposed Rémançon, 'for the Government will be on your side, merely in opposition to the Socialists. This fact will be of great service for us in the official world. . . . And that is a point worth considering. . . . Those in power think that you will come to their side, sooner or later. At any rate, they will always prefer you before a public agitator.'

'Sooner or later! Yes!' said Dartigues, with a laugh. 'That is Rémançon's favourite remark.'

'With it, my dear friend, you promise nothing, and leave the door open to hope. It is a very convenient phrase, for, in politics, nothing is more embarrassing than making engagements.'

'Nonsense! If only you make up your mind not to keep them!'

'Cynicism only lasts for a time. Better reserve the solution of a problem; in this way, the result may be discounted.'

'How is your journal, the *Southern Echo*, going along?' asked Dartigues.

'I have been taking that in hand,' said Claude Brun. 'We have a splendid editor, a former communard, who has been brought to reason, and has discovered that it is more profitable to work for the capitalist classes than to attempt to destroy them. He has plenty of capacity, and is free from scruples. True, he has met with a foeman worthy of his steel, for during the past fortnight the *Southern Alarm* has been publishing articles signed "P. A." of a terribly lashing and cutting nature. It appears he belongs to the Paris press. . . .'

'Well, well, we had worse opponents beneath the equator, where politics are carried on with the aid of revolvers. As soon as he is tired of attacking me, he will calm down of himself. After all, I never read newspapers, even my own. . . .'

'I will keep you *au courant* of whatever is taking place. . . .'

'Success is the main thing,' said Barandet. 'What matters it if a candidate is covered with insult and

infamy, if he is elected all the same? Everything is forgotten the morrow of the victory, and success is the best brush in the world for removing filth and mud. Nowadays, amid such a marked degradation of conscience and character, a man such as Maillane is bound to come into office. The apotheosis of capitalistic society cannot be effected without one of its most admirable representatives figuring therein. Capacity of every kind is now crushed beneath the yoke of wealth. Financial power is limitless, since everything is for sale. The man who holds in his hand the golden lever, with which the world may be raised, must be among those who are to decide the fate of society. This is the reason we shall effect the election of our friend, by every means at our disposal. Once there, I know him sufficiently well to be certain he will not halt along such a glorious path. Power will be within his reach, and he will know how best to use it. Once in the Ministry, with the finance or commerce of France at his disposal, think what Maillane, with his fine intelligence and will-power, will be in a position to do for those who have helped him to rise. Courage, friends! let us work for this election, as though we were working for ourselves. To the success of Maillane, a success to be wrought through us!'

Barandet took in his hand a glass of champagne, and raised it aloft as though to invoke Fortune. His companions, electrified into action, did the same. Dartigues, inflamed by desire, gave way to the intoxication of triumph. All his life he had had confidence in his triumphant destiny, and on hearing his friends acclaim him in this way, he really believed in his power and happiness. He felt capable of fulfilling his every

wish, and his eyes flashed with enthusiasm as he raised his glass and said :

'I accept the covenant; you shall share in my success. Our fortunes shall remain united; they shall prosper by the same means. The support you give me I will return to the full. When I think from what a low condition I started, I believe myself capable of attaining to any height. I am not like certain people, in whom ambition diminishes with success. My desires increase the higher I rise. The broad expanse of horizon now opening before my eyes has no terrors for me. It was just the same with me when I was young : nothing I obtained ever satisfied me. Always farther and higher has been my rule of conduct throughout life. At times I have had terrible falls, but I have always come again to the surface, and to-day here I am, more ardent than ever for the strife, more enamoured than ever of success. Come, then, let us fulfil our destiny right to the end !'

'There !' exclaimed Rémançon, 'Maillane is indeed the man of energy, for whom the means are nothing and the end everything.'

'In a condition of society so corrupt as the present, so firm a determination and will are bound to be victorious !'

'All the same, a little coolness would not be amiss,' murmured Claude Brun. 'We must proceed neither too fast nor too far. Above all, it would be bad policy to exclaim on the housetops that we have no scruples.'

Barandet smiled in a way which exposed an abyss of moral degradation in his nature :

'That will easily be discovered by the result !'

Rémançon and Barandet passed out on to the terrace,

whilst Brun and Dartigues remained alone in the study. Then Claude took a bundle of papers from the desk, and said :

'I spoke to you just now of the articles directed against you in the *Southern Alarm ;* you seemed to attach no importance to them. Perhaps you would be more interested did you know the anonymous writer who conceals his identity under the initials "P. A." with which they are signed.'

'Who is he ?' asked Dartigues.

'Well, I had the curiosity to discover the author, for, you know, I am very precise, and like to get at the root of things. The writer of the "P. A." articles is named Pierre Appel . . .'

Dartigues, who was lolling in an armchair, on hearing these words, suddenly rose to his feet ; a changed expression came over his face as he asked :

'Appel ? . . .'

'Yes,' repeated Claude Brun, with a cunning smile, 'Appel. Your memory is still good, for even after twenty years, you still remember that Appel was the young doctor, your next-door neighbour in the Rue Condorcet, Paris.'

'Appel !' repeated Dartigues, turning pale. 'The man who . . .'

He left the sentence unfinished. Claude took up the thread :

'Who showed himself on such friendly relations, in those days, with your former wife.'

Dartigues made no reply. The grave, thoughtful face of Appel came back to his memory. He saw him climbing the steep staircase, a pile of books under his arm, and passing silently into the corridor. Appel !

What a coincidence! Why had this phantom returned into his life? Who could this Pierre Appel be? A young man, Brun had said. Doctor Appel must now be about fifty years of age, so that he could not be mistaken for the writer of the articles. Dartigues raised his head, and looked at Claude:

'Then you have seen this young man?'

'No. He had just left for Paris when I arrived. But I obtained all the information I wished concerning him. In all fairness, it must be said for these people in the South that they cannot keep anything to themselves. M. Pierre Appel is a very fine young fellow, twenty-five years of age, very witty and gay—a poet, and a talented . . .'

'But how is he related to Doctor Appel?'

'Some say that the young man is his son, others his step-son.'

'Appel had no child twenty years ago. . . . He was a bachelor. . . .'

'Very well; then he is his wife's child, . . .' said Brun coolly.

'His wife's child? . . .'

'Certainly. He may have given him his name. . . . Suppose Doctor Appel to have married a divorced woman, for instance, who had a son by her first marriage. He has educated the child, and, to suppress all trace of the real father, has demanded permission to give him his name. . . . So that this young man who was formerly named . . .'

The cunning Claude stopped, an ugly smile coming over his face. The lord of Maillane repeated in changed accents:

'. . . Who was formerly named? . . .'

Then, boldly facing the other, he continued vehemently:

'Say frankly what you really think, what you suspect, or what you know, without keeping me in suspense. This young man who now goes under the name of Appel was named Dartigues as a child? Is that what you mean? That he is my son?'

'Upon my word of honour, I do not know!' exclaimed Brun. 'But I imagine it is so. The Christian name is the same. Appel had no child, and I do not know what has become of Francine. . . .'

'Very good! I will undertake to find out. It is useful to be thoroughly acquainted with those with whom one has dealings. If Appel, better informed than we are, has instigated his son to attack his father, good! Instead of sending an enemy against me, he may perhaps have furnished me with an ally!'

Barandet and Rémançon, at this juncture, appeared on the terrace with the ladies. Dartigues placed his finger to his lips, as a recommendation to Claude to say nothing further, and, with a smile as though there were not a single cloud on the horizon of his happiness, he hurried to meet his friends.

CHAPTER IV

A TAP by no means gentle was heard at the door, and a loud voice exclaimed :

'May I come in ?'

Before a reply could be given, a short, thin man, with a smooth, glabrous face, long gray hair, and a mouth wreathed in smiles, entered the room where lodged Pierre Appel at the Crowned Peacock Hotel. Pierre stretched at full length on a country bed, so lofty that a ladder would have been needed to mount it comfortably, stretched out his arms, yawned, and finally asked :

'What time is it ? Is the house on fire, or has the Durance overflowed its banks ?'

'No, my young friend,' replied the visitor. 'It is only eight o'clock. The hotel is quite safe, and the Durance as dry as ever, but the sire of Maillane arrived at his château last night with all his *smalah*.'

'Nonsense !'

'It is the truth nevertheless. I called round last night to inform you of this news, but found you were not in. . . .'

'I had gone as far as Arles, and did not return till very late. . . . I was on a visit to the arena. . . . An archæological trip, nothing more !'

The young man flung aside the bed-clothes, and leapt

on to the floor. Thrusting his feet into a pair of Turkish slippers, he began to walk, half naked, about the room. He was a finely-built, handsome, blonde young man, with frank blue eyes. Taking a cigarette from the mantelpiece, he lit it, and continued his walk. His visitor had quietly taken a seat in a large rustic armchair.

'There are about half a dozen of them at the château, including Barandet and Rémançon. . . .'

'And what kind of a man is M. de Maillane ?'

'Oh, he remains indoors with his wife and step-daughter. He is a great business captain. . . .'

'Well, Des Barres must carry off this election. The honour of the proletariat demands such an issue. Besides, he is a friend of my father's.'

'Doctor Appel does not hold the same opinions as Des Barres, and yet he is very anxious that the latter win his election. . . .'

The young man had now almost finished dressing, and flinging away his cigarette, he vigorously rang the bell :

'They don't seem to care about bringing me anything to eat in this hotel. . . . It is already nine o'clock. . . .'

Returning to his companion, he said :

'Doctor Appel does not trouble about politics ; he is entirely given up to philanthropy. But, then, he has been Des Barres' friend all his life, and would sacrifice a great deal to be of service to him. . . .'

'Even to the point of giving up his son to write articles in the *Southern Alarm*.'

'Certainly, my dear M. Bréloquier. True, Des Barres is my master ; it is he who has educated me and made me what I am. . . .'

'A poet and a thinker,' said Bréloquier deferentially.

'No nonsense!' exclaimed the young man abruptly. 'You know well enough that I attach little importance to flattery. How an old democrat like you can make such remarks . . .'

'I speak as I think,' replied the journalist. 'You have a splendid future before you. Among the rising generation I do not know a single one with a better head than yours. . . .'

The entrance of the servant put an end to the conversation. She brought some coffee and a milk-jug on a tray.

'I have kept you waiting a little, M. Pierre, but we were all occupied in rolling barrels of wine which had been ordered by the lord of the château. . . .'

'The lord?' repeated Pierre disdainfully. 'Don't you know there are no lords in France nowadays? . . .'

When the girl had left the room, Pierre poured his coffee and milk into the cup, sat down, and turning to Bréloquier, said:

'You see, the electoral traffic is already beginning. The wine of the hotel is being bought by the château, and will be drunk by the peasants. Bribery will help the matter along, for, once they are drunk, they will vote for M. de Maillane to a man. . . . Bréloquier, when once Socialism wins the day, shall we maintain the right to vote? Universal suffrage is a fine swindle!'

'Ah, my young man, I don't deny that it is a dangerous instrument. In certain respects, it resembles M. Prudhomme's sword, which he used in defence of power, and, when necessary, to attack it. . . . Everything will depend in whose hands it is to be placed. . . . That is the reason it is important that our party

gain the upper hand in Parliament. . . . The sire de Maillane is the very prototype of our opponents. He incarnates the capitalistic society with all its blemishes. He is glutted with gold, and recognises no other power than that of gold. With such a talisman, he is certain to bring the universe to subjection, and the worst of it is that he is not mistaken.'

'Are you showing discouragement?'

'No. Only experience. . . . I see a great deal in merely looking around me. People who are incorruptible are extremely rare. Shall I tell you what I really think? They don't exist.'

'Oh!' exclaimed the young man warmly, thrusting aside the table, 'Des Barres, and my father, and myself. . . .'

The old Socialist shook his head, as a faint smile played around his lips:

'Des Barres is an admirable character, your father is a benefactor of humanity, and yourself, you are filled with generous ardour. . . . But what would become of all these virtues, when brought in contact with that terrible dissolvent, interest? Better not put them to the test, my young friend. To be certain not to know what defeat means, there is nothing like avoiding a battle.'

'Bréloquier, you are mad!' replied Pierre abruptly, 'or, rather, your ideas have become embittered by the injustice of life. This is very pardonable in a man like yourself, born to attain the highest destinies. . . .'

'And who has remained in the slums, wretched and unknown—in a word, a miserable failure, that is what you mean. Yes, my dear child, in opposition to M. de Maillane, I am the prototype of fidelity to con-

viction. And you see what success such fidelity has brought me. All my companions of the Commune are at this present time on the pinnacle of power. Plunderers of public and private funds, incendiaries of every description, all condemned to transportation, now pardoned, caressed and flattered, are living distinguished and respectable lives. True, they have abjured their past. But are not fortune and public consideration a fine recompense for apostasy? I have remained what I was, and would even to-day sign my articles as they appeared in the Revolution. True, I would no longer write them, for I am now aware how far I can rely on my former friends. I sometimes meet those with whom I once drank and smoked in the fine salons of the Hôtel de Ville. The cowards among them avoid meeting me, whilst the impudent ones wave me a protecting salute. They are now deputies, senators, magistrates, ministers, etc. . . . Every one has abdicated his youthful opinions. They say of me: "Bréloquier? Poor fellow! Poor belated insurgent!" I say of them: "Hypocrites! Well-fed sectarians!" They pity me; I despise them. That is the only difference, but it is a vast one, and I would not change places with them for the world.'

A period of silence followed. The old revolutionary was buried in reflection, whilst the young man looked at him with a certain curiosity mingled with emotion. Wishing to free him from a train of meditation, which he judged must be of a painful nature, he said:

'So M. de Maillane has come down here to uphold his candidature. Well, it was only what one might have expected. Claude Brun, however skilful he may be, is not the man to arrange successfully so important

a matter. The administration will be dead against us, and local interests, gratified by the announcement of the projected canal, will win over the most stubborn among the electors. . . .'

'Without mentioning the influence Mme. de Maillane and her daughter will exert over the minds of the female portion of the community.'

'Ah! There is a daughter?'

'Yes, by her first marriage. Heiress of the ferocious General Hermandez, who brought about a regular reign of terror in Paraguay, to such an extent that at the elections for the presidency, not only had he no rivals, but no one had the courage to place in the ballot-box a single bulletin which did not bear his name.'

'Is she thinking of placing such a tradition at the service of M. de Maillane?'

'Ah! If looks could only kill, she has a pair of eyes which would enable her to do infinite damage.'

'Then you have seen her?'

'Yesterday, at the station. Between ourselves, Claude Brun seems bent on mounting guard over this beautiful young lady, and would not be sorry to appropriate her to himself. . . .'

'That old villain?'

'Ah! My dear friend, you need not look upon every man of forty-five years of age as gouty and decrepit. . . . And Claude Brun does not appear even so old, for he has not a single gray hair, and is as keen and shrewd as ever. . . . He has absolute power over M. de Maillane, his partner. . . . A great number of services rendered would be repaid by a marriage. . . . He is rich. . . . And you are well aware that in financial circles youth and good looks count for nothing,

and young girls are easily found only too willing to marry rich and influential old men. . . . It is there that the morals of the capitalist classes are so odious, for with them everything, even youth and beauty, can be bought and sold !'

'Ah ! Does not the same state of things exist among the people ?'

'The lower classes are corrupted by the example of the upper ; they are cankered by the contagion of vice. Evidently a handsome work-girl of twenty would not refuse the hand of her master, though he be as old as her father, for then she will be rich and well-dressed. Do away with the masters, and the beautiful young girl will marry a handsome fellow of her own age ; social equality would restore purity to love.'

'I seem to be listening to Des Barres,' said Pierre.

'You do me too much honour in saying so, though I am well aware that our opinions are the same.'

Rising, he took a cigarette from the mantelpiece, and after lighting it, said :

'I must leave you now that you are aware of the arrival of our opponent. I will see you again shortly, for you will call for me, I suppose ?'

'After lunch.'

Bréloquier took his hat and left the room. At that very hour M. de Maillane, after spending an excellent night, was dictating his mail, which Claude Brun had methodically prepared for him. The former broker was an excellent business man, who had preserved from his earlier life and profession a preciseness and promptitude which had greatly contributed to the success of Dartigues' vast undertakings. The man of figures ever pitilessly forced a financial precision on the man

of dreams, over whom he had thus acquired an authority he only used on important occasions. Seated in the well-appointed study in front of one another, they both gave the utmost attention to the numerous details of their divers affairs.

'I must call your attention to Bermann's fresh demand for money. True, as controller at Gabès, he rendered us important services, for which, by the way, he has been largely recompensed. Since being discharged, he has sold all his shares. . . . We can do nothing against him. . . .'

'Does he gamble?'

'Yes, in the gambling-hells of Paris. The reason of his discharge is that he fell into discredit at Gabès. . . . A pity, for he was an intelligent fellow. . . .'

'In a word, he wants to blackmail us now. Can he do it?'

'No, not without ruining himself. For the mere sake of playing us a trick, he will not go to the extent of accusing himself of having betrayed his trust.'

'Has he any papers relating to us?'

'He may have notes on the transfer of the Redjidah lands. . . .'

'We must buy them from him. What are they worth?'

'A large sum in the hands of a man of influence. In those of a ruined individual, five hundred louis. And for such a sum he would prostrate himself to the ground for very gratitude.'

'Good! I will leave it to you.'

'You know that to-day is market-day, and that all the farmers in the neighbourhood are coming here to sell their products. . . . You have a fine opportunity of seeing and speaking to them.'

'I do not intend to miss it, for our opponents will be there also, and I wish to make their acquaintance.'

The two men exchanged a significant look.

'Young Appel returned last night to the Crowned Peacock, after a two-days' absence,' said Brun.

'How do you obtain your information?'

'Oh, I have my own agents. The young fellow does not stir a step abroad without my knowing all about it. Hotel servants are very fond of gold pins and trifles of that kind, for which one can obtain anything one wishes. . . . If I liked, they would tell me his very words. . . . Ah! he is anything but mistrustful, for he does not mind what he says. . . .'

'How is he physically?' asked Dartigues.

'Oh, he is a fine, handsome fellow! When you see him, you will be surprised. . . .'

Dartigues had another question at the tip of his tongue, but on seeing a mocking smile on the lips of Claude, he had not the courage to put it into words. With a sigh, he passed to another subject:

'My wife complains of the temperature. She felt quite cold last night.'

'Then how will she find Paris? True, the heat here in the South of France cannot be compared with that under the Equator. . . . What does Mlle. Bella think of it?'

Dartigues returned the ironical question by answering:

'My step-daughter is only eighteen years of age. One is never cold when one is young.'

The sound of the luncheon-bell interrupted the two men. The one they had just been speaking of entered the study, whilst close on her heels followed Rémançon, accompanied by the President's widow.

'You have been working long enough,' said the young girl, with a merry laugh. 'My mother and I have not left America to come and live among speculators. . . . We want to see none but gay and lively faces around us. . . .'

'And don't forget to have the hot-air stoves working at night-time,' said Mme. Dartigues. 'Your South of France, after five o'clock in the afternoon, is as cold as the North Pole. . . .'

'I will have some furs sent for you from Paris.'

'Many thanks, but we will go and buy them ourselves, for I hope you will not keep us long in this frightful little town for the sake of your election. . . . Pay whatever is necessary to be nominated, and let us hear nothing more of the matter.'

'Ah, madame,' said Barandet, who entered at that moment, 'everything is not yet on sale in France.'

The President's widow replied jestingly:

'What progress you have still to make!'

The doors of the salon and dining-room were now thrown open. Rémançon offered his arm to Bella, whilst Barandet took Mme. Dartigues to dinner.

The town of Maillane consists of two quarters: the old Maillane, where silkworm nurseries and oil-works stand on the hill at the foot of which flows the Arbosque, a small tributary of the Durance, which traverses the pebbles of the Léberon, and the fertile valley stretching away to Avignon; and the new Maillane, to which a considerable number of merchants retire after making their fortunes, attracted by the beauty of the situation, the freshness of the banks, and the cooling shade afforded by the olives which abound in the district.

The total population comprises about three thousand souls, half the electors of the district.

Dartigues had several methods of moulding public opinion, and he had captivated Maillane by his promise to bring forward the old project of canalizing the Arbosque, which had already been under investigation during the first Empire. As a matter of fact, the winter rains and spring thaws cause great disaster in the valley. On the other hand, the river is quite dried up in summer. So that the fertility of the valley would be increased tenfold, and the natural riches of the soil could easily be exploited, if reservoirs could be constructed to keep in the water when too abundant, and pour it into the Arbosque during the dry season by means of dams, the water being kept at a constant level in the canal.

Dartigues quite understood the importance of this plan, and was also aware that, if put into execution, his own property would be considerably increased in value, so that, in floating a company for the construction of the canal, he was working for himself as well as for his future election. But he wanted the State to participate in the matter, and it was there the administration entered on the scene. Dartigues' journal for the last fortnight had spoken of nothing but the advantages the canal afforded.

The Saturday in question being a market-day, there had been a great deal of animation in view of the coming proceedings. All the cafés on the town hall square had served thrice the number of customers that generally frequented them. Here keen electoral discussions took place, the most prominent among the disputants being a former edge-tool maker, named Langlevès, now

retired from business. He could not have borne the sight of a mangled dog, but here, at the Café du Commerce, he was enthusiastically in favour of a social levelling-down by fire and sword. His second was named Pagevin, a gardener from Lyons, who since retiring to Maillane had spent his time in cultivating roses, which he had the chagrin every year to see wither away and die by reason of the extreme dryness of the climate. He could not forgive humanity for this periodical catastrophe, and the death of his roses induced him to favour the extermination of the capitalist classes.

These two madmen were fine sport for Pierre Appel. The penchant for jest possessed by the young Parisian induced him to excite these two politicians to frightfully extravagant language. After nine o'clock people began to enter the Café du Commerce, and around the two chiefs were grouped the oil-merchants of old Maillane and the retired merchants of the new town. Conversation began to be lively, and Bréloquier, superior in intellect to the rest, though compelled by the necessities of the electoral campaign, undertaken in support of Des Barres, to take part in these dull, tiresome meetings, vaguely listened to the discussions of those present, adding an occasional word from time to time.

This morning Pagevin was of a lyrical disposition. He had just belaboured the upper classes in a fine peroration, calling upon the democracy to enter upon the class struggle, when the door of the café opened, and Claude Brun, followed by M. de Maillane, appeared on the threshold. Pagevin turned pale, his voice stuck in his throat, and, after looking at the new-comers with astonished eyes, he asked :

'What do these men want here?'

'These men,' replied Claude, with a smile, 'have come to listen to all the excellent things you have been uttering, to profit by them if possible, M. Pagevin.'

At that moment Bréloquier touched Pierre Appel by the elbow, and whispered to him:

'These are our opponents. The fine tall man, with hair tinged with gray, is M. de Maillane; the short dark man is Claude Brun.'

Pierre's eyes were fixed on Dartigues, who had just taken a seat near the entrance-door. Dartigues caught his eyes at the same time, and a shock came over the candidate, for there in front of him sat Francine, feature for feature. The blue eyes, pink complexion, and light, curly hair—everything in the young man recalled to his mind the woman he had abandoned, whilst in certain movements of eyebrows and lips he recognised himself as he had been twenty years before. He could not remove his eyes from the young man's face, and a profound sentiment of melancholy came over him. Without a doubt, this was the son of Francine and of himself. Suddenly, he felt himself attracted towards this young politician; he felt he must touch him, speak to him, clasp him in his arms. The emotion which had overcome him appeared in his face, for Claude Brun, laying his hand on his companion's arm, said:

'Compose yourself!'

But Dartigues paid no attention to the recommendation of his prudent counsellor, and replied in trembling tones:

'There is not the slightest doubt! How could you

have doubted that he is my son? He is my son—do you hear?—my own son.'

'He is the son of your enemy, since it is his name that he bears,' said Claude grimly. 'And you can have nothing useful to expect of him if you are not careful as to how you make yourself known to him. Wait, watch and listen. Then you may act.'

What followed proved that Claude Brun was right. Langlevès had risen to his feet, and pronounced emphatically the words:

'What can there be in common between the partisans of Des Barres, the people's friend, and M. de Maillane, the protégé of power?'

'The same meeting-place,' said Pierre Appel, with a smile. 'Do you intend to refuse our opponents the right of discussion, M. Langlevès? If our side is the only one to speak, we are sure to be always in the right. It is from contradiction that light springs forth. If these gentlemen come to meet us on our own ground, shall we refuse the struggle?'

'Old combatants such as we are will never bow to our adversaries; but we know with whom we have to deal!' shouted Pagevin.

'On the contrary,' interrupted Dartigues calmly, 'I imagine you have a very faint idea. Besides, I have not called here this morning to discuss politics.'

'Then will you please tell us why you have come?' asked Langlevès.

'I wish to have a few minutes' conversation with M. Pierre Appel. It is a private matter, quite as interesting to him as to myself. . . . If he will come out with me for a short time on to the square . . .'

'Private matter! Take care, young man,' said Pagevin. 'This is a gilded bait with which these capitalist agents will try to capture you!'

'What can I have to fear?' interrupted Pierre. 'Do you take me for a fool? I am not so easy to deceive as you may imagine.'

Rising, he gave Bréloquier a look of confidence, and said:

'I will be back in a moment, Bréloquier. Wait for me. . . .'

And following Dartigues, he left the room. The square was covered with open-air shops, flat baskets, and detached carts; it was a spot where farmers and dealers sold their products to the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood. The open square in front of the town hall was crowded with people. Here gossip was exchanged, the current rate of grain and oil fixed, and orders for sales and purchases given and taken. The horse-dealers of the plains of Arles, with their large hats and leathern gaiters, were leaning on their whips, a sly expression on the face of each. The oil-dealers of the Arbosque, thin and tanned like Arabs, were volubly driving bargains. Fish-women with coloured head-dress were summoning thrifty housewives, making their shining merchandise wriggle in their baskets. The sun gilded this dazzling picture with flaming rays, and in the light of the transparent air the whole of nature assumed an aspect of joy. The two men stood for a moment looking at the spectacle. Pierre, wishing to show that he was absolutely free-minded, said:

'It is only here in this wonderful South that life is so exuberant and hearty. These people are no better

than others, though they appear to be so, and that is a great deal.'

'Yes, they certainly do appear so,' replied Dartigues. 'But appearances are deceptive.'

'Do you say that for yourself or for me?' asked Pierre rather stiffly.

'For both of us,' replied Dartigues solemnly.

'Will you please explain? I do not quite understand.'

'It is to make you understand that I requested a minute's talk with you. And that you might listen to me freely, and without being troubled, I have brought you here, out in the open air, away from your friends.'

'Without being troubled?' repeated the young man. 'Why should I be troubled?'

'By reason of the revelations I have to make to you.'

Pierre looked steadily at Dartigues, and, without replying, began to walk by his side at a quicker pace. They had now left the square and reached the banks of the Arbosque. A slight stream of water ran through the rocky bed of the river. Frail poplars grew on the banks, beneath whose shade grew the scanty herbage. The two walkers were now alone, and Pierre, looking steadily at his companion, said:

'Now let us see what your revelations really are.'

'You are twenty-four years of age, young man, and for the last twenty years have been living under the direction of Doctor Appel, who has brought you up, though he is not your father, in spite of the fact that you bear his name. . . .'

'That is quite true. I love him tenderly, for he has been extremely good to me, and it is to him that I owe everything.'

'Except life. . . .'

'And do I not owe him that also, for it is he who has fed and educated me? If I am physically the son of another, he is morally my father. He has opened out my mind, disciplined my thought; all I know comes from him; the little I am worth proceeds from his will. In a word, he has been my real father, and after extending his kindness to its utmost limit, he tried to think what final benefit he could bestow on me. And he, an illustrious savant, decided to bestow on me his name—on me, who otherwise would have been one of the most insignificant creatures on earth!'

The young man's animation had increased as he spoke, and Dartigues imagined he was listening to himself speaking, when, in the earlier part of his life, he waxed enthusiastic over his own pet plans. With a shake of the head, he said:

'But your father—the one by whose name you are not called? . . .'

'He is dead.'

'Who has told you this?'

'My mother.'

'Suppose she deceived you?'

'Why should she deceive me?'

A silence followed. Dartigues, before Pierre's generous, open nature, was no longer in possession of his usual boldness, and dared not mention the delicate subject he had made up his mind to introduce. All the same, it was not in his nature to retreat, so he asked the question:

'Do you remember your father?'

'Yes, sir. I was four years old when I lost him. But I can picture him to myself quite distinctly in a

little room in the Rue Condorcet, where, as my mother has often told me, we passed a wretched existence. The harmony between my mother and father was anything but peaceful. Doubtless the trouble was due to the fact that they both had a hard struggle for existence.'

'Does your mother ever complain of him whenever she mentions his name?'

'Never! My mother was too proud to speak evil of my father. The picture she gave me of him was that of a very intelligent man, whose great fault was that he attempted too many things at once. He died in poverty, without any of his efforts being crowned with success.'

'Then you have been told that he died in poverty?'

'This is the second time you appear to doubt the truth of what my mother told me,' said Pierre haughtily. 'I should prefer to put an end to this interview if we are to continue so. You speak to me of family matters, by what right I have not the faintest idea, nor do I care to continue the conversation.'

'Very good, my friend,' said Dartigues, with a smile of satisfaction. 'I like to hear you speak in this way. Your proud and loyal character pleases me, for you are just as your father would have liked you to be. But undeceive yourself, if you imagine I take an interest in your family affairs without an excellent motive. I notice that you have been kept in absolute ignorance as to your real position, and that Doctor Appel has completely inveigled you, after obtaining the complicity of your mother.'

'Sir!' interrupted Pierre, unable to restrain his anger.

'Patience, my young friend!' said Dartigues. 'You

must learn how to listen to truth. And the first part of the truth, so far as you are concerned, is that your father is living.'

'Are you sure of what you now state?'

'As sure as I am that I am now speaking to you.'

'Can you prove what you affirm?'

'Without the slightest difficulty.'

Pierre gave a gesture of stupefaction.

'Then why should I have been deceived?'

'Ah! That is not for me to explain. Doubtless you will understand the reason, once you understand under what circumstances the separation between your father and mother took place. . . .'

'Then they were separated?'

'Yes.'

'For what reason?'

'They could no longer agree.'

'Which of the two was in the wrong?'

As Dartigues looked at the young man, he read on his face, torn with anguish, the fear of hearing his mother accused.

With a sad shake of the head, he replied:

'Far from me the thought of saying evil to a son concerning his mother, for I should consider it a duty to maintain absolute silence. The disagreement between your parents arose from difference of aspiration. Your mother's ideal was a quiet, peaceful existence, whilst your father was ruled by a boundless ambition. The one tried to scale the heights, though he dashed himself to pieces on the way. The other always dissuaded him from making the attempt. In his efforts to succeed, your father often sacrificed the peace and security of the present in favour of the dazzling hopes

of the future. Poverty and misery did not trouble him, for he felt sure of recompensing the momentary wretchedness by lasting joy and prosperity. But your mother suffered and complained of this state of things. One day, your father, tired of struggling against the material impossibilities to which he was exposed by methodical European customs, determined to emigrate to America, in search of new fields, in which activity and intelligence would be certain of success. Your mother was altogether opposed to the proposal, and he attempted in vain to induce her to leave with him. She was his wife, the mother of his child, but she was attached to her native land, and absolutely refused to leave it. Perhaps, terrified by the repeated lack of success from which she had so keenly suffered, she was wanting in courage, and dared not follow her husband in a hazardous attempt, which might reduce her to the most wretched condition. Misery in one's own land and in the midst of friends is hard to endure, but is not poverty and wretchedness in a foreign land a hundred times worse ? For all these reasons, which I now explain to you, to assure you of my impartiality, your mother would not consent to leave France, and your father went alone.'

An amazed silence was the answer to Dartigues' final words. The only sounds that could be heard were the faint rustling of the poplar-leaves beneath a gentle breeze and the trickling of the stream. Pierre, abashed, stood there with bent head, as though ashamed of his mother's pusillanimity. With a profound sigh, he asked :

'Then you know my father ?'

'Yes.'

'Is he happy?'

'He has succeeded in everything he undertook. After treating him harshly, Fortune has heaped her favours on him. He is very wealthy.'

'But is he happy?' insisted the young man.

'Like your mother, he has begun his life over again. In America he married a woman he loved. All the same, he never ceased thinking of you. And his happiness, about which you are so solicitous, can never be complete so long as he is separated from you.'

'But he abandoned my mother!' exclaimed Pierre, giving way to a sudden burst of anger. 'For twenty years he has not given the faintest sign of life! What does he wish now?'

'Young man,' replied Dartigues, 'do not judge him too hastily. You have never known anything of the difficulties of life, nor are you acquainted with the tyranny they exercise. Does one always act as one would like? No more than one obtains the object of one's desire. Wait till you have seen more of life before forming an opinion.'

'But shall I be obliged to decide between my father and my mother?' exclaimed Pierre in a tone of anguish.

'Who would ask you to do such a thing? Certainly not your father, that I will swear. He is too well acquainted with human weakness not to know the meaning of indulgence. You may judge whether your mother is or is not of a less conciliating disposition.'

'But who are you, sir, who speak to me in this way? What mysterious influence is this you claim over me?'

Dartigues smiled.

'You call yourself Pierre Appel,' he said, 'but I

scarcely imagine you can be ignorant of your real name, the one which appears in the city register ?'

'My name is Pierre Dartigues.'

At these words the other's features expressed the greatest emotion, tears sprang to his eyes, as he said in trembling tones :

'They call me M. de Maillane, for I am in possession of this château. But this is only a borrowed name like yours. My real name is Jean Dartigues. . . .'

Pierre turned suddenly pale, his ears tingled, and, with troubled expression, he looked full into the face of the one who had uttered these decisive words. He finally stammered out :

'You are . . .'

He saw Jean Dartigues' arms open, but he did not fling himself into them. A feeling of constraint he could not overcome seemed to hold him back. Before this man whom he now knew he felt cold as ice.

Jean Dartigues murmured softly :

'Yes, I am your father.' And, seeing the young man standing undecided by his side, he added : 'Will you not let me kiss you ?'

Then Pierre, ashamed of his lack of feeling, smiled at this manifestation of affection now offered, and father and son were the next moment silently clasped in one another's arms.

CHAPTER V

DES BARRES was one morning at his office, writing an article for the *Revanche du Peuple*, when the old servant entered without knocking at the door, and, absolutely indifferent to the disturbance she might occasion, said:

'M. Appel is here, sir.'

'Who? Pierre?' asked Des Barres, raising his leonine head.

'No, Doctor Appel. . . .'

Des Barres rose to his feet, pushed aside his papers, went straight to the door, and, on seeing his friend, said:

'Ah! It is really you at this hour? What is the meaning of this? Something happened? Come in. . . . Rose, leave us. . . .'

'Indeed, I had no intention to stay and listen to you!' snapped the servant. 'Leave us! A fine aristocratic way of speaking. Leave us!'

And she left the room in a rage. Des Barres did not even pretend to pay the slightest attention to this tyrant in petticoats, whose rough language he willingly endured by reason of her faithful service for the past twenty years. Leading Appel to the window, he attentively examined his face, then, taking a seat in front of him, he said:

'You do not appear to be quite yourself, my friend.

Besides, you ought to be at the hospital just now. Is there anything wrong? Is Francine ill? Or has Pierre got into some scrape or other?'

'No. But we are afraid something of the kind may happen. For more than a week we have had no news of him. All the same, we receive anonymous letters. . . .'

'Ah! ah! What about?'

'With reference to the electoral campaign he is engaged in, on your behalf, at Maillane.'

'Well! well! What is there to trouble about?' asked Des Barres calmly. 'They tell you your son is defending the cause of an enemy of society, a leveller, a monster raving for gold and blood? I know what to think as to the opinions they may express concerning me. Then they probably add that Pierre is a product of secular education, an enemy to his country, etc. . . . You know the whole string. . . . Well! What then?'

'All you are saying is beside the question,' said Appel coldly. 'It is rumoured that Pierre makes common cause with your opponent, M. de Maillane, that he never leaves the château, and dines there every evening. It is insinuated that a ravishing American girl, step-daughter of the candidate, is the irresistible bait used to seduce the ex-defender of your cause.'

'The deuce!' exclaimed Des Barres.

The two friends looked at one another in a very serious fashion. Des Barres rose to his feet, took up his cherry-wood pipe lying on the mantelpiece, filled it without uttering a word, and, after lighting it, again sat down. Appel, with downcast head, was buried in reflection. He was just the same tall thin man on whose aristocratic, intelligent face shone a look of

exquisite kindness. His long hair was now white as snow, and his pensive brow lined with wrinkles. The overcoat he wore seemed the same as the one he had worn twenty years ago, with the exception that it was neither threadbare at the elbows nor white at the seams. His broad-brimmed silk hat, too, no longer had that russet tint from being too often exposed to the rain, as in former days.

'For a youth so strongly impregnated with your principles to come to such a compromise, he must have very serious reasons,' said Des Barres. 'In such a case, I believe neither in the corruption of luxury, nor in the attraction of beauty. So upright and frank a nature as Pierre's does not sink to treason for the sake of a few petty pleasures. We have tempered him too well to believe that he is of so vulgar a metal.'

'That is what I say to myself; but my uneasiness is only increased by such reflections. The more certain we are of his moral worth, the more serious would be his capitulation. A frivolous, light-hearted disposition might be seduced, but Pierre . . .'

Des Barres dashed his hand violently on the desk as he exclaimed:

'How stupid we are! An anonymous letter is worth nothing at all! Here we are troubling ourselves about such nonsense! Have you made inquiries to ascertain whether this news is true or not?'

'I tell you, Pierre has not written for a week. The coincidence is a singular one, at any rate. . . . His mother is half dead with anxiety about him.'

'What can there be at the bottom of it all?' continued Des Barres, as he puffed the clouds of smoke into the air. 'A pretty girl? Ah! ah! . . .'

At that moment the old servant appeared at the door, exclaiming in rough tones :

'M. Bréloquier wishes to speak to you, sir. . . .'

'Bréloquier ? Pardieu ! He has just called at the right time. . . .'

'You might easily say so without swearing !' growled Rose.

'Show him in,' said Des Barres.

'He can find his way himself, I should think. He knows the house well enough.'

Bréloquier entered. Walking straight to his master, he shook him by the hand, bowed to Appel, and, carefully placing his hat on a chair, said :

'I am very glad to find the doctor here, for I have some news to give him.'

'He thought so.'

'How could he ?'

'Your news has reference to Pierre, has it not ?'

'Yes, but who told you ?'

Des Barres smiled.

'It is now evident who the anonymous coward is.'

'Then they have written to you ? All the better ; I shall have the less to explain.'

'What is the meaning of this change of conduct ?'

'Ah ! I have come all the way from Maillane to ask you this very question, for I can make nothing whatever of the present state of things.'

'You have seen him recently, I suppose ? What has he told you ?'

'I have not seen him at all, except from a distance. He was never at his hotel, and he avoided me in the street, for he has longer legs and better wind than myself. . . .'

'Then he is afraid of having an explanation to give. Consequently he is in the wrong. This is very little in harmony with my idea of him,' said Appel sorrowfully. 'Someone has greatly changed him. Who can it be?'

'The man who came to the Café du Commerce, before my very eyes, during the market, exactly a week ago. . . .'

'M. de Maillane? How did they become acquainted?'

'Ah! I cannot tell you how astonished I was. They left the café together. I felt certain of seeing him return an hour after, but he did not appear. I cannot tell how that adventurer did it, but he has captivated Pierre to such a degree that I have not spoken a word with him since.'

Appel was deep in reflection. Finally he said:

'So you have seen this M. de Maillane. What kind of a man is he?'

'A tall, handsome, gray-haired man, with a soft, persuasive voice and a wonderful amount of assurance. He appeared about fifty years of age.'

'Maillane! Maillane!' murmured Appel. 'I know no one of that name. Who can he be?'

'On entering the café, he was accompanied by a friend of his, a short, dark-complexioned man, whom I knew well, and who, I feel certain, is a regular rascal. His name is Claude Brun.'

Appel turned pale. With a gesture of stupefied astonishment, he dashed his hand against his forehead:

'Claude Brun! Then everything is perfectly clear; there is no further illusion possible! Poor child! Unhappy woman!'

'What is the matter? Who is this man?' asked Des Barres.

'A ghost! Jean Dartigues!'

'The deuce!' exclaimed Des Barres.

The two men once more became silent. Bréloquier guessed that he would be in the way if he remained any longer, so, with friendly tact, he rose to his feet.

'You now know all I can tell you. I will see you again this evening; just now I have an engagement.'

'Very well, we will dine together to-night.'

'Agreed!'

'Do you need any money, now that you are back in Paris?'

'No, thanks; I have received my month's pay.'

He left the room.

'A fine, honest fellow,' said Des Barres. 'And not without talent either. But, then, he belonged to the Commune, and has kept to his ideas of former days! And this is no recommendation with those actually in power, who are almost all turncoats.'

'Turncoat!' said Appel bitterly. 'That is nothing. But to turn one's heart and brain. . . . How can one reach such a pitch as that? And yet it is what this wretched child has done within a week! All that was needed was that a man should suddenly appear before him—a man he had not seen for twenty years, and whom he had no remembrance of—and there he follows him and is subjected to his influence.'

'That man is his father!' said Des Barres.

'His father? I am his father!' replied Appel in accents of grief. 'From the natural and legal points of view, he is the father, but is he so from the point of view of society? Not at all! And that is the only consideration which interests us. Theirs is a stupid law, belonging to feudal times. It creates exclusively

the independence of the male, imposes on the mother all the charges, and refuses to allow her to escape the duty imposed by maternity. As for the father, he may disappear—he has been the triumphant creator—whilst the mother remains with her child on her arms. Later on, if the fugitive returns, and is pleased to remember that he is a father, or if it is to his interest to do so, all he needs to do is to show himself. He has entire material authority over mother and child. Such is the law ; and you appear to consider that quite simple, Des Barres, and when you have said, "He is the father," you think you have explained everything !'

'I explain nothing whatever; I merely state a fact. You well know I have no intention of entering upon a discussion of principles with you, my old friend, for you are aware of my opinions quite as well as I am myself. I am no partisan of paternal authority for which I would substitute that of the State. I do not approve of differences of education in children, which result in differences of disposition in the heads of families. The one side is too gentle, the other too harsh. There exist inequalities of conditions for childhood which, to me, appear harmful from a social point of view. But I cannot prevent a father from being a father, nor can I bring it about that the mind of a child like Pierre, as well as his heart, should be strangely affected by the sudden appearance of a man to whom he is attached by the bond of blood. These physical phenomena cannot be discussed; their existence imposes itself. Just now we have before us two men, both of them fathers in their way: Jean Dartigues, the physical, and yourself the moral, creator. The first has only one right, though a very strong one: he

has given life. The second has a thousand rights, for he has been the educator, the intellectual creator; he has formed the soul and watched carefully over it for the past twenty years with the most tender and enlightened solicitude. Which of the two antagonists will win? The one whose kiss sufficed to cause the paternal blood to be recognised by the son? Or the one from whom a single word ought to suffice to cause his governing power to be accepted by his grateful disciple? This is a fine psychological problem, my friend, and, for such a savant as you are, the study of a soul must be full of passion. Have you been a good master, Appel? Have you modelled this mind in such a way as to render it capable of a sufficiently complete discernment to give you the solution you wish to have? You will reap what you have sown, doctor. And if you have made a man of this young Dartigues, if you have not given him your name to no purpose, he will, in a single moment, repay you for what you have done for him during the whole of his life.'

'But you say nothing of his mother,' said Appel in tones of deep melancholy. 'His mother has no rival; he has no choice to make between her and another. . . .'

'You are mistaken! Did you not hear what Bréloquier said? There is the young lady!' replied Des Barres in bitter tones. 'And here again we see instinct brought into contact with reasoning. The mother and duty on the one hand; the father and love on the other. Which will triumph, love or duty?'

He relapsed into silence, and Appel made no reply. Finally, with a gloomy expression of countenance, he said:

'In what light can one even examine the situation?'

'Ah, my friend, you place yourself in the narrow limits of the abstract. You do not take into account circumstances and environment. Pierre is only twenty-four years of age; he is passionate and vigorous. He sees himself suddenly brought face to face with all kinds of temptations. The most satisfactory sophisms are offered him, to convince him that it is quite natural that he should yield to them. He is brought into contact with his father, a rich, seductive, generous father, surrounded by all the brilliancy of luxury, and accompanied, so we hear, by his step-daughter, a very beautiful girl. Everything concurs to trouble and captivate his mind. Because he yields, or appears to yield for the time being, do you think he is deserting you? You astonish me! All that is happening is quite simple; Pierre is a man, consequently feeble. You expect him to be a stoic, and to hear him from the outset repulse his father with the words: "Away! I do not know you!" After all, how do you know that the brave fellow has not already said this, and that the other, with his fine words, has not deceived him as to the real situation? What has he told Pierre about his mother and yourself?'

'The wretch! If he has dared vilify Francine! . . .' exclaimed Appel.

'Come, come! A little *sang-froid*, doctor. This is a fine opportunity for Dartigues. He finds himself confronted with a divorce which has permitted his wife to marry M. Appel. Why this divorce? He must have explained the rupture between his wife and himself in the most advantageous manner to himself. You can imagine how troubled Pierre must be. In reality, he is obliged to note that his mother is no longer his

father's wife, and this gives him cause for doubt and grief. He no longer writes ? I can quite understand it. What should he write ? He could merely say that he had found his father, and ask why you have taken his place at the family hearth. Feeling that he would offend you, he prefers to say nothing, to suffer in solitude. That is a sign of respect and affection. You understand, Appel, I am just trying to show you the difficulties of the situation in which Pierre finds himself. It is a way of excusing him if not of freeing him from all blame. Evidently, he is not a miracle of virtue, but then, neither is he a monster of ingratitude. Reserve your judgment, and, above all, prepare for the fight, well persuaded that you have a strong enemy to resist.'

'I know the man ; I am quite aware of what Dartigues is capable. Now that he calls himself M. de Maillane we know him just the same. The affair of Tunis, the port of Gabès, the Tripolitan Railway affair are all evidences that this unscrupulous adventurer will hesitate at nothing. His allies, Rémançon and Barandet, have long ago lost their reputation in the world of finance. They form part of the band of speculators which defiled the Republican régime, disgusted public opinion, enervated national defence, and sold the conscience of France to the foreigner. We have been struggling against these villains the past twenty years. You speak of the fight: has it not begun long ago ? Between such men and ourselves it is a war to the death. Either they will triumph, and France will fall to the position of Spain, or we shall crush them, in which case we may hope for the return of the country to a glorious destiny. The weapons of our opponents consist of corruption, lying, and treachery. They have

great advantages in combating by such means, but we shall see what right can do, and whether, in spite of all, it will not carry off the victory.'

'Ah! how eloquent and passionate you are! And you, usually so cold and reserved!' said Des Barres. 'You must feel yourself far more on our side now that you have no general difficulty to solve, but instead, a difficulty which affects you personally. How little help there is in philosophy when one suffers, eh? How really one feels one's self on the side of the poor when one is being throttled by a powerful villain! You will readily pass from theory to practice in your work of defence.'

'Meanwhile, what do you advise me to do?'

'In the first place, to say nothing to your wife.'

'But she is very uneasy already.'

'You may reassure her as regards Pierre's health, since you have seen Bréloquier. Invent some tale or other to explain why he has not written. Besides, you must be patient yourself; time will arrange everything.'

'Still, I ought not to allow this Dartigues to pervert Pierre's mind without attempting to counterbalance his influence.'

'In what way?'

'By setting out at once for Maillane.'

'Ah! That is the very last thing for you to do! As soon as you set foot in the village everybody would be anxious to know why you had come, and the consequences of the step would be incalculable. That is something you might attempt as a final resource, when all other means have been employed, and all one can do will be to plunge in the gulf to bring him to the surface.

Until that time come, we must temporize at all costs. Bite away at the bit, but do not stir!'

'Cannot one begin to do anything against this Dartigues?'

'That is another question. We are in the midst of an electoral campaign, and one has the right to speak. If what is said does not suit the sire of Maillane, he shall kindly give the reason why. I have some terrible charges against him. What astonishes me on the part of these filibusters is that they appear to have forgotten all about their rascally tricks, and never think they will be used against them. Their simplicity is only equalled by their villainy.'

'You are mistaken, Des Barres; they are relying on the scruples of honest men, and saying to themselves: "They will never dare to use against us the weapons we use against others." Their confidence is a supreme homage given to the delicacy of their opponents.'

'Well!' said Des Barres, with a laugh, 'let us undeceive them, and act without scruple for once. Dartigues has sown the wind, he shall reap the whirlwind!'

'Good-bye,' said Appel, shaking his friend by the hand. 'I must now return to give Francine some news of her son. I wish they could have been more reassuring.'

In her small salon in the Rue de Luxembourg, the windows of which looked upon the old palace of the Medicis, Mme. Appel sat working at her embroidery. Her finely-shaped head was bowed, in an attitude of reflection, over her work. The sadness of the early part of her life had imprinted on her features a melancholy grace. Though no more than forty-six years of

age, her hair was quite gray. Even after success and fortune had crowned the efforts of Appel, she had never been able to cure herself of the dull uneasiness which her troubled life with Dartigues had inspired in her soul. She was ever expecting some misfortune or other.

Appel, now Professor of Physiology, Member of the Academy of Medicine, universally regarded as one of the lights of science in France, had reached the highest summit of his ambition, but even now Francine had never for a single day enjoyed this wonderful destiny in complete peace. All the satisfaction her second husband gave her could not obliterate the anguish and bitterness caused by the first. The seal of misfortune had been too strongly stamped on her soul. Its mark was indelible. She had not even been able to cure herself of certain physical shocks she experienced—as, for instance, the noise made by the sudden opening of a door, the arrival of someone suddenly before her, the bringing of a telegram, all of which caused her to turn pale, sending a thrill through her frame. The doctor gently scolded her for her nervousness. She listened to him with a smile, but did not correct herself, or, rather, could not effect a perfect cure.

All the same, she was as happy as it was possible to be. The memory of Dartigues, however, poisoned all her joys, and she would become quite gloomy at times, as though she expected to see him appear before her. Though far away, he had not vanished from her life; he haunted her continually. What had become of him? Never since their separation had she heard any mention of him. Was he alive or dead? A secret instinct told her that he was living, and that she would

see him again some day. For her, there was nothing threatening in his reappearance, for she was now as free from him as she possibly could be. And for her son, she ought to have had nothing to fear, since the divorce court had given her the guardianship of the child. But, then, she knew what Dartigues was capable of, and how great were his persuasive powers. If he took the fancy to win back his son, how could he be prevented from doing so?

There was only one means: the revelation of the whole past to Pierre, the unveiling of his father's faults and blemishes. Would not this be a source of great humiliation and grief for the young man's proud though generous heart? Would it not be a gloomy defence for her to say to her son, 'Your father is a rascal'? Thoughts like these, long dwelt upon in solitude, had prematurely aged Francine and cast a shade of gloom over her beautiful face.

She interested herself greatly in works of charity, and most of the fees Appel received from his wealthy patients went to the poor. In spite of this, however, the simplicity of their life enabled them to become rich by the very nature of their circumstances.

At the age of fifty, he was at the head of the medical world. In all the scientific circles of Europe they said: 'There is Professor Appel, a great French physician.' In spite of this uncontested supremacy, he was loved by everybody. His modest reserve, which was regarded as coldness by the indifferent, disarmed all rivals. The strong opposition he showed to the Government, an opposition which had led him to refuse all distinctions, had made him very popular among the students. Such remarks as the following were often heard at the

School of Medicine: 'Appel is a fine fellow! The Government cannot seduce him with a piece of ribbon or a well-paid sinecure. If you want serious protection, apply to Appel; he will do his best for you! In examinations, all that he recognises is the candidate's merit. . . .'

He had not changed in this respect from what he was in his youth: incapable of lying to his conscience, full of intellectual modesty, passionately fond of merit, and capable of sacrificing everything to his convictions. This thin, pale man, with a sickly mien, had a beautifully modulated voice, quite irresistible for those who listened to him at the Faculty. If the lecture-hall had been open to ladies, they would have raved over him. Only once had he appeared in public, at the amphitheatre of the Sorbonne, where he had given an address on vitalism before the Medical Congress. The effect produced was wonderful; he was cheered and called for again and again, like a popular actor, as he made his escape through a side-door, accompanied by his wife.

This popular savant and defender of humanity had been requested by his friends to stand for the Senatorial elections. He had been asked to make one concession: not to speak, in his profession of faith, of the religious question. He had refused with the words: 'I am a believer. In times when atheism is a career, I should consider it cowardly not to proclaim my convictions. If I agreed to appeal for the votes of the Radical electors of Paris, I should expect to obtain from them the right to defend religion in all its necessary manifestations. You see, it is preferable for me not to offer myself. Besides, what business have I in Parliament? I have scarcely time to attend to my

patients. Leave me to my work, and nominate someone not so busy as I am, and who does not hold the same opinions.'

Francine's life had become more refined by contact with this noble and superior mind. Her education, far superior to that of Dartigues, was as nothing compared with that of Appel. With that easy assimilation peculiar to woman, she had acquired the rich development of general ideas. Her mind, daily nourished by conversation, with ingenious and striking appreciations on both present and past topics, on the characters of the day, and on new theories, had acquired a more than ordinary breadth of view. She could enter into intelligent conversation with the illustrious men her husband received. Though fond of home life, in official meetings she gave evidence of sober and grave elegance which attracted the sympathy of all present. The voice of slander which might easily have been raised against her, by reason of her former unhappy and commonplace condition, could not find an unkind word to utter, and everyone who knew her loved her.

With eyes fixed on her embroidery, Francine sat working steadily, when a well-known step in the next room roused her from her meditation. Rising hurriedly, she ran to open the door, just as Appel entered.

'Well?' she asked.

'Well, Des Barres knew no more than we did. The correspondent of the *Tocsin*, however, arrived from Maillane as I was speaking to him, and it appears that Pierre is quite well. So that it is nothing but negligence on his part; he has not written because he has been so busy with the electoral campaign. . . .'

Francine looked at her husband with a shake of the head. Taking a seat, she said sadly :

' You will never succeed in deceiving me, my friend, though you try to reassure me; I see you are quite uneasy yourself. I know you so well, that by the mere sound of your voice I can guess what you really think. You have heard bad news you do not wish to tell me. You are wrong; it is your duty to tell me the truth. Mon Dieu ! Pierre is not ill, is he ?'

' Should I be here if he were ?'

' Ah ! this time you are telling the truth,' she said, with a gentle smile. ' No, you would be at his pillow. But if he is not ill physically, he may be morally. And that is perhaps an even more serious matter. Please do not deceive me. You know I am strong in presence of realities. But suspicion and uncertainty take away all my strength. . . . Come ! what is the matter ?'

Appel, placed on his guard by Francine's clairvoyance, tried hard to deceive her.

' What can I say ? I know nothing important, and am incapable of inventing incidents which will explain Pierre's silence. Bréloquier says he has spent a few days at Arles. . . . This news we were aware of, for his last letter was dated from that town. There is no occasion to torture your mind for so simple a thing. Your son has imposed on you very bad habits in writing so regularly. . . . And now that his zeal relaxes, do you look upon him as guilty ? Poor Pierre !'

' You pity him ?'

' I think it is you who are unjust.'

On hearing these words uttered by one in whom she had implicit confidence, Francine fell once more into

a meditative mood. She began to ask herself if her fears were not really, after all, rather premature.

'It is all your fault,' she said gently. 'For the last twenty years you have rendered my life so calm and easy-going that I have become suspicious at the very first difficulty. Formerly, I should not have considered it extraordinary to have a motive for uneasiness, for trouble happened so often! You have made me too happy! Is this now all at an end?'

'No, for I shall never change; in whatever trials you may have to bear, you will always find me at hand to help you to overcome them. That is the reason I consider your anxiety exaggerated. There is nothing compromised, and yet you become quite alarmed. You must try to have a little more *sang-froid*. One often creates imaginary trouble throughout life, and when you look for the danger, you find you have been terrified by mere phantoms, and that by using a little more patience or reason you would have escaped all trouble. This is your case at present, I imagine.'

'Ever since last night, I have been thinking of the situation,' continued Francine gravely, 'and I ask myself the question whether or not we have brought up Pierre rather too seriously. His childhood was anything but gay, for his early years were passed by my side. And for many years afterwards he spent his life at our side, without an opportunity of comparing such a life with any other. Now that he is free, and sees all kinds of people, I am afraid he must have come to the conclusion that there was not sufficient attraction at home. And such a disposition is only a step removed from leaving us! Oh, he will always love us, but if he

were to go away, and live apart from us, what a deception it would be for our old age!'

'One must always expect to be separated from one's children,' said Appel. 'We too readily imagine that children are created for their parents. This is a mistake; they are created for themselves. They have everything to expect from our tenderness and love, and we, very little gratitude to expect from them. It has been so all along the ages, and will continue so as long as the sun gives light to the earth. Poor Francine! What illusions you are creating for yourself, if you imagine you can keep your son to yourself alone! Your case is the same as that of every French mother, and our country suffers greatly in consequence. You are all too careful mothers, and you cannot endure to be separated from your children. And yet, to effect the expansion of our nation throughout the earth, you must acquire the habit of living without having your children ever by your sides. At the age of sixteen the boys ought to travel, to traverse continents, accustom themselves to business, learn foreign languages in the countries where they are spoken, become accustomed to decide for themselves, and accept responsibilities on their own account, instead of running away to father or mother with the words: "What must I do in this case?" . . . A young Englishman or American has more of the spirit of decision in his character at the age of twenty than a Frenchman of thirty. This is the cause of the stagnation of our business, the weakening of our influence and greatness. As you see, one may confront one's self with the general question from looking at merely one side of it, and conclude that the weakness of

France is due to the weakness of the French mother.'

Francine smiled sadly.

'I tell you my worries, and you reply by a lecture on political economy. Do you think I can be troubled with the fate of France when I see my son leave me? I can think of only one thing—that I am alone, and my home is gloomy, because he who should be its light is not here. I cannot feel anxious concerning the diminution of the national power when I feel the love grow feebler in my child's heart. I do not know whether all French mothers are like me, but I hope they are not, for they must be very miserable and wretched if their children neglect them. Doubtless I am very selfish, but I want my child. I did not give birth to him for the sake of others, and besides, no one will ever love him so well as I do.'

'Poor woman! Certainly it is you who have loved him best. But is that any reason why he should not love others as well as yourself?'

'Say more than myself, for that is what you think! Ah! I well know how vainly a mother brings up her child, spends days and nights in watching over him, and, even when he is handsome and strong, is willing to undergo, if need be, every sacrifice to make his life easy and happy. Then a girl comes along whom he has never seen before; he follows her, and everything is forgotten; he will do anything to satisfy her, to obtain a smile from her. This I am well aware of; the ungrateful son will even trample on his mother's heart to obtain favour from the loved one. In your masculine egoism, you look upon this as perfectly natural. One may well see that you have not given your very blood

and the best of yourself to the child who leaves one without a memory or regret. To understand what abominable grief and pain there is in such an abandonment, one must have the heart of a woman !'

She burst into sobs, and Appel watched her in gloomy silence. He had exhausted his arguments, for all his logic seemed cold indeed by the side of Francine's grief. He felt how just was her complaint, and knew that she was clairvoyant in her trouble. The idea that a terrible confirmation of her vague fears might be given her by the revelation of the intimacy existing between Pierre and Dartigues sent a shudder through his frame. A mere hazard might acquaint her with the situation, so full of danger and care. Suppose a letter came in his absence, and the poor woman, unprepared for the news, were to read it ! The whole work of moral healing he had undertaken during the past twenty years, and which he had hoped was at an end, seemed to crumble away into ashes, and of a whole lifetime of labour and rectitude there remained nothing but ruins.

This should never happen. Appel in a moment made up his mind to resist this abortion of his whole destiny. He saw clearly, as in a mirror, that the actual situation was bristling with danger, though he did not consider it compromised beyond hope of remedy. He did not despair of Pierre's intelligence, and was proud enough to think that a man educated by himself would not act like any ordinary human being. A ray of light came over his gloomy countenance, and as he walked to and fro in the salon Francine was startled by the change.

'What is the matter with you ?' she asked.

'I have reflected on all you have just been saying,' said he, 'and see how annoying it is to reason according to one's own ideas always, without putting one's self in the place of one's contradictor. If one does not do this, one may so easily be unjust. Very well! In my opinion you are not wrong; your grief, the sacrifices you have made, and the perfectly moral integrity of your life give you the right to exact from your son a certain amount of attention, even reverence. Note, however, that Pierre is ignorant of what he owes you. Through a delicacy of which I entirely approve, you have concealed from him his father's conduct and the sad circumstances under which this latter left Pierre and yourself. An explanation on this point with your son would, I am certain, open his eyes and bring him back to your side, without any possibility of a fresh defection. Do you authorize me to have this explanation?'

'How?' said Francine in an accent of grief.

'By sending for Pierre or going to see him myself.'

'Why should you do so?' she again asked, an almost threatening expression in her eyes as she fixed them on Appel's expressive countenance. 'Why are you so anxious, amidst all your other occupations, to enlighten Pierre on so sorrowful a past? Is it necessary that he know to-day what yesterday he was ignorant of? What is this you are hiding from me, for I feel there is something besides what you have said? For the first time in twenty years the memory of Dartigues has entered our lives.'

'It was inevitable,' said Appel. 'There was destined to come an hour when the past would be summoned up, and an explanation would have to be given.

Whether that hour has come or not Pierre alone can tell us.'

'What are you afraid of? You are in dread of some complication I cannot explain.'

He made no reply. Again there came into her eyes an expression of anguish as she said:

'What has become of Dartigues? That is the dark spot in our horizon, as I have often said myself. A kind of shame prevented me from speaking of it to you, but I was always thinking of this wretch from fear of seeing him again. What has he done? Is he still alive? Have I any reason to fear him? Oh! you see how the dreams of my lonely hours take shapes unto themselves! I did not know what I might have dreaded. But now I know. . . . Swear to me that you have had no news of Dartigues! Swear that he has no part in your trouble and in my anguish!'

'I cannot say! I swear I do not know!' exclaimed Appel.

'But you do not swear that Dartigues has not re-appeared, and that you have been informed of it. . . . You cannot make up your mind to lie, but you are not telling me the whole truth. . . . Now listen: I assure you, you are quite wrong. I should greatly prefer to know the truth. Do not dose it out to me day after day. . . . Treat me honourably, and do not look upon me as a weak-minded creature. . . . I can endure the shock. . . . For pity's sake, do not keep silence any longer. It is my son, my own son, whom I wish to hear of. Tell me everything I have a right to know.'

Appel resisted no longer. His continued silence would be torture for Francine. Accordingly he did as she requested.

'Well, you are quite right. Dartigues has re-appeared.'

'Where?'

'At Maillane.'

'And Pierre has seen him?'

'He has; they have been together a whole week.'

'And it is just a week since he gave up writing! What can the wretch have done to gain such possession over him?'

'I will tell you what reply Des Barres gave me: he told him that he was his father.'

'Well, I should think Pierre must have discovered that such news was rather old!'

Appel shook his head.

'In the depths of every human heart there is a latent sentimentality which will burst forth, often at the wrong time, though this manifestation decides the most important situations. As you are aware, a maddened crowd can be calmed by a timely word. Can you wonder that a son is overcome by his father's voice when that father possesses the persuasive qualities of Dartigues? You have often told me that he was a most skilful and seductive talker, and that no one could present an enterprise under a more seductive aspect than he could. In such an important matter as the present, do you think he will have shown himself inferior to what he is in general? Will he have employed less talent in seducing his son than in winning over to his side a majority of shareholders? No; our poor Pierre will not have weighed heavy in the powerful hand of this adventurer.'

'You speak of him as of one who is very influential. . . .'

'So he is.'

'Then he has made his fortune?'

'An immense fortune. He has just returned from the New World with millions. . . .'

A smile softened Francine's anxious brow.

'Then he has succeeded in realizing his dream. He must be very happy!'

Appel looked at her tenderly.

'What a noble heart you have! You rejoice at his success even when he makes you suffer!'

'If he is happy,' said Francine, 'why should he be wicked? He has never done any harm except when it has been to his interest to do it. Now that fortune has smiled on him, and he has obtained what he desired above everything else, great wealth, will he not show himself indulgent towards those who have had other conceptions of ambition?'

'But suppose it were to his interest to win over Pierre, do you think he is a man to hesitate?'

'Explain yourself.'

'The reason you have not been acquainted earlier with the reappearance of Dartigues is that he has changed his name, at the same time as his condition in life. You have often seen in the journals the new name he has adopted. I myself was acquainted with it before knowing that it represented Dartigues.'

'Then what does he call himself now?'

'M. de Maillane.'

'Des Barres' rival?'

'Yes, whose candidature in the South Pierre has gone to oppose.'

'Ah! I understand everything now! And the situation is far more terrible than I feared at first!

Dartigues' opposition, caused by a tardy affection for his son, must be fertile in grievous complications, but what must be said of the hostility to which his wish to overcome Des Barres will drive him in his efforts against us ? From the very outset the struggle will be implacable. It is the strife between two principles even more than between two sentiments. This unhappy child will have to choose between his father, armed with all the seduction of a brilliant and joyous life, and ourselves, who have never spoken to him of anything other than laborious and stern duties. Appel, have we not been wrong in showing ourselves so austere ? Have we not prepared our defeat by rendering our cause less attractive ? Should we not have been less rigid ? We have imposed on him part of the weight of our own sorrows. And now another will perhaps steal him from us by offering him nothing but joy !'

'In a word,' said Appel firmly, 'you think Pierre will allow himself to be won over. I cannot do him so cruel an injustice, and do not believe we have been wrong in strongly arming our son for the battles of life by teaching him everything which tends to form a valiant soul and a generous heart. Far from fearing the result, I await it with confidence. If we have sown good seed, we shall reap a harvest of courage, honour, and uprightness. The very near future will tell us whether or not we have succeeded in making a man of him. The whole question lies there. I do not say that we shall not have to struggle and suffer, and that he, on his side, will not have to fight and weep. The important thing is that he win the victory ! Our own satisfaction must count for nothing in the struggle now beginning. My whole desire and ambition may be

summed up in the assurance that I have created a man!'

An ardent blush had mounted to the savant's cheeks. His voice thrilled, and his whole attitude bespoke energy. Francine anxiously raised her eyes to her husband's face.

'All the same, you do not intend to leave Pierre to himself? That would be risking too much!'

'I intend this very day to telegraph, requesting him to return to Paris. We must have some definite explanation. Do not be uneasy; I intend to play my part, and I will do all I can to assure myself of victory.'

Francine shook her head sadly.

'Take care! You will have to deal with one who will have no scruples in cheating you.'

CHAPTER VI

It was a glorious evening, one of those nights which, in the South of France, are warmer than the days, the wind, which has fallen, no longer bringing down into the plains the fresh coolness of the snow-capped Alps. Not a leaf quivered in all the plane and sycamore trees which surrounded the terrace of Maillane. The moon's silver rays lit up the lawns which gently declined to the banks of the Arbosque. All the windows of the salon were open, and glowed red in the semi-obscurity. It was nine o'clock, and, dinner being over, Dartigues' guests were sipping their coffee. The President's widow, enveloped in a pelisse of cream-coloured silk lined with sable, sat with her feet in front of a large bright fire. Ever since leaving America she had never succeeded in warming herself throughout.

'Where can the children be?' she asked.

'They are taking a walk in the park,' said Dartigues.

'They will take cold.'

'Do not be anxious about them. It is quite summer weather. . . .'

'But what pleasure can they find walking to and fro on the terrace on such a damp night?'

'They are talking to one another, telling one another things which you would consider devoid of interest, though full of charm for them. Perhaps they are

walking about without uttering a single word, and finding considerable pleasure in it, for one of them is twenty-four years of age, and the other eighteen. At that age the moonlight has a special meaning, the sounds of the night a particular charm ; for, in a word, they are young, and youth brings delicious pleasures in its train. Such graybeards as Rémançon, Barandet and myself are no longer acquainted with such sensations, are we ? We prefer to smoke a good cigar, seated in a soft, luxurious armchair, but that is because we cannot do otherwise. . . .'

'Speak for yourself, Dartigues,' said Rémançon quickly. 'For my part, I could very well take a moonlight walk, if I wished. . . . Thank God, I am not obliged to trouble myself with serious matters alone. There is a time for everything !'

This conversation was interrupted by Pierre and Bella, who entered by way of the door-window leading into the garden. Their very differences combined to form a charming couple. She was small and dark, with eyes like black diamonds, whilst he was tall and fair, with frank blue eyes. They were already quite good companions, smiling and talking all the time. Behind them glided Claude Brun, whose absence had not been remarked, nor was his return noticed at all. He had followed the young couple into the park, spying their gestures and words. He was even paler than usual, and drew near the fireplace as though he were cold.

'Well,' said Dartigues calmly, 'have you had a pleasant walk ?'

'Yes, father,' replied Pierre ; 'but it was beginning to feel rather cool, so I advised Mlle. Hermandez

to return, and I have now come to ask your permission to leave——'

'Shall I have the horses harnessed ?'

'Oh no! It is only half an hour's walk. . . . I do not wish to trouble anyone.'

Dartigues' countenance became overcast, and after walking to and fro for a few seconds, he said :

'Very well! As you please!'

He passed into his study, whilst Pierre was taking leave of the others. In spite of all he could do, the ice was not yet melted between his son and himself. Pierre's attitude was one of reserve ; he did not disdain the expressions of affection which Dartigues lavished on him, though he received them with the utmost caution. He kept on the defensive. After expecting to win him over to his side without any difficulty, the cajoler discovered that all his duping had been of no avail, and that this young man, to whom he had been a stranger for the last twenty years, now refused his full confidence without absolutely rebuffing him. He was humiliated and pained at the same time by such conduct. Accustomed to conquer, he recognised that he could do nothing at a time when it was so important that he should not fail in his attempt. Besides, he felt a very strong affection for this handsome young fellow who flattered his *amour propre*. He was very anxious to win Pierre's love in return.

This was the substance of his thoughts and reflections whilst awaiting Pierre. Not a single time did he accuse himself of being the author of his present painful situation, with that admirable faculty of seeing nothing but the future and its promises ; he

had forgotten the past and its misery. Self-reproach was no part of his nature, and his conscience was so inactive that one might well have asked whether it were not altogether dead. Perhaps conscience is nothing more than a manifestation of anxiety in weak and timid people. He, at any rate, was strong; that he had proved on many occasions. A light step, a creak of the door, caused him to turn his head. Pierre stood before him. Dartigues looked at him for an instant, then, with a shake of the head, he said:

'So you are going away, like a guest, after dinner, returning to your hotel, when there are a score of rooms in your father's house quite unoccupied.'

'You are jesting with me,' said Pierre calmly. 'Doubtless you are right, but, though I had the best intentions in the world, I could not satisfy you. It is a defect of education; I am very difficult to tame.'

'Why are you so full of mistrust? What are you afraid of?'

'Nothing at all.'

'Has anyone in this house received you ungraciously, without my knowledge?'

'No one. On the contrary . . .'

'Then why will you not come and stay here? It would be so natural and simple to do so. My house is yours; try to get into the habit of thinking so, and act accordingly.'

'I assure you I should like to be able to do so very much, since you wish it; but it appears impossible.'

'Because . . .'

'Because I should be obliged to change all my habits, and that is a work before which I hesitate.'

'I do not understand.'

'I will explain. There is nothing in your way of looking at life in accordance with what I have been accustomed to see around me up to the present. I have lived among people with as simple habits as I have myself. All this luxury with which you are surrounded appears to me mere superfluity in which I could take no part without inconvenience and regret . . .'

'Regret!'

'Oh! do not misunderstand me; I have no pretension to give you a lesson in sociology. All the same, during the week in which I have been living in your midst I have been watching and studying. You are living here the life of a lord; it is perhaps this which has troubled me most, father. . . . Had you been a poor man, I would have sat at your hearth with much more joy and spontaneity, and, I believe, have made a better effort to compensate your humble condition by the warmth of my feelings. In a word, it seems to me that I should have the more easily loved a father surrounded with less ostentation and magnificence. . . . Perhaps this princely luxury intimidates me somewhat. . . . Pardon me if I speak so frankly, but I merely say what I think, and it is better that you should know it.'

'I suspected there was something of this kind in your mind,' said Dartigues, with a smile. 'I, too, have been studying you, and, with my experience, I may say that I know how to read character. Besides, I am well aware of the principles in which you have been educated. You did not allow me to forget them, for your electoral polemics were vigorous enough.

Much might be said on the matter, but now is not the occasion. I simply wish you to note that, in life, every man has principles which fit in best with his situation, his wishes, or his interests. It is very seldom you meet with millionaires willing to divide their wealth, and even rarer to see a poor ragged fellow with highly conservative opinions. This is quite natural; I merely state a fact, without discussing it. Hitherto you have lived in the society of people of intellect, whose active qualities have been spent in political and social speculation. Such people, my dear Pierre, are mere pedants. They bear the same relation to humanity at large which professors of the military art bear to great generals. They teach, but do not apply their teachings. Think of what a Carnot is compared with a Bonaparte. Well! idealogists are children in economics compared with the men who carry on the business of the world. It is useless to talk nonsense or humbug to the latter. They have established the difference between theory and practice. They have dealt with difficulties of execution which do not exist on paper, but immediately spring into being as soon as a material realization is attempted. All sociology, my dear Pierre, is powerless in front of a workshop where there are ten thousand workmen to manage, as I have had to do in America. There, talking is not enough; one must order and act. Equality disappears in a moment, and hierarchy takes its place. There is one chief and many servants. Necessity had given each one his place; had it not been so, chaos would inevitably have been the result. This situation being granted, the advantages become pro-

portional to the importance of individual effort. He who has digged the ground does not earn the same wage as the one who has traced the place for the excavation, and the latter is less remunerated than the man who has conducted and promoted the whole affair. This is what becomes of collectivism, my dear son, when brought into contact with the necessities of execution. I am not giving you these explanations in order to modify your ideas. I have no wish to do so, but only to get you to understand that it is to the interest of the world in general if I have become rich. I have given work to thousands of men, carried civilization into far-away countries, brought light and intelligence to what was formerly a savage, untilled part of the world. I have rendered as many services as a conqueror, and have realized a conqueror's fortune. You ought not to despise all this luxury. What would you say of me if, though I had millions, I kept them stored away like a miser? In such a case it would be quite right for you to find fault. What! All this wealth in the hands of a single man, and he makes no use of it? This stream of gold which he has dammed up, why does he not introduce it into commerce, so as to bring comfort to thousands of workers? Such a man would be a criminal, for he holds a considerable portion of the public fortune, and yet, contrary to all justice, prevents it from circulating. There, my dear child, you would be right, for the real, fruitful, regenerating Socialism does not consist in preventing people from becoming rich, but from becoming miserly. You see, now, how unjust you are in saying that the style in which I live offends you. If I did not live in this way, and

spend a great deal of money in what you call superfluities, I should be doing a wrong to society, whose sources of production, in a certain measure, I should dry up. Accordingly, I must be prodigal, under penalty of meriting real blame. And you, Pierre, ought not to avoid me for strictly accomplishing my social duty.'

The Dartigues of bygone days had reappeared, full of insinuating, persuasive grace. All the powers of fascination that voice, look, and gesture could give he put into force to captivate this rebel who opposed his will. Seeing him uncertain, hesitating, and unwilling to allow him to gain possession of his mind, he said :

' Besides, you ought not to despise this fortune, for it is destined for you, and already partly belongs to you. . . .'

' Father !' exclaimed Pierre in troubled tones.

' What is the matter ? I don't suppose that you, and those with similar ideas to yours, have yet abolished the system of heritage ? Well, then, you are my son, my sole heir. All I have earned, and shall yet earn, will constitute your patrimony. Think of that, my child. When one has an income of twelve hundred thousand francs, one does not live as though one had nothing at all. The horizon changes when one looks from a height. You must regard the future under the real aspect it is to have for you. Money is capable of accomplishing much in this life ; not only is it a means of action, it can also be put to the service of your ideas and tastes. Intrinsically, it deserves nothing but scorn, but the manner in which it is used ennobles it. My opinion is that, in this century of

evolution, a rich man who used his immense capital in the solution of social problems would be a real benefactor of humanity. I could not be such a man, for I have not the necessary instruction ; I have not lived in a current of ideas which would permit of such experiments. I am only a money-earning machine, but I know my business, that I can promise you. What will prevent your being the enlightened dispenser of this wealth I shall accumulate by my efforts ? My tastes are simple, and I have no pleasure in anything besides my work. At bottom, I have never ceased being a workman, though now a master. What I am interested in is the inauguration, the development and success of an undertaking. Well ! I shall be well content to take up your social reforms. You will explain them to me, and I will try to render them practical. We two might obtain unexpected results, since, to realize your conceptions, I should bring to your help my experience and my money. You cannot think that I am offering myself for election for the mere pleasure of obtaining a seat in the Chamber. France, my dear Pierre, is governed by a mob of idiots. Amongst all our politicians, there are not ten who know exactly what they want to do, or towards what they are tending. I tell you, it would not be difficult to obtain control of all these puppets, and pull the strings just as one wished. That was what tempted me. And this poor France of ours has such need of reform !'

'Ah ! now you are speaking just like Des Barres !' said Pierre, with a smile.

'Possibly. But I do not think that I should act as he would do, for I am anything but a Utopist. I

know men too well, and have no confidence in their wisdom. In my opinion, centuries would be needed to make them leave their ordinary routine. All the good that can be done will be done, in spite of themselves, and they will be terribly angry against those who have helped them. But that is no reason for not trying.'

Dartigues took a cigarette, lit it, and changing the conversation, said :

'We have been speaking very seriously, and I had no intention of entering upon such grave speculations. From the particular case in hand, we have come to consider the general situation. To return to the subject, I wish you, henceforth, to deprive yourself of nothing. Here I find you putting up at a small hotel, just like a commercial traveller. That is not at all the right thing to do.'

Opening a drawer, he took out a small chamois-covered case, and handing it to Pierre, said :

'Here is a cheque-book in your name. There are a hundred thousand francs deposited to your account in the Crédit Lyonnais. Employ this money just as you wish, either for use or pleasure. You know, my dear child, I have not been working all my life to see you deny yourself a little pleasure. . . .'

'But, father . . . I should not know what to do with it,' said Pierre, with a blush.

'Ah ! if you refuse, I shall think you no longer love me ! What is this in comparison with what I should like to give you ?'

He had enfolded Pierre in his arms, and, softly slipping the cheque-book into his pocket, said :

'I have a great deal to recompense you for ; but I am even richer in affection than in money. You do

not know your father yet, my dear child. I dream of the most brilliant and glorious destiny imaginable for you, and am anxious that you should owe all your happiness to me. To begin with, you see, I leave you free, whatever it cost me. Well, then, go if you wish, but do not forget that it will be a happy day for me when you return here to stay. . . .'

He kissed him tenderly, and accompanied him to the hall. With alert steps Pierre plunged into the darkness of the night. He was still quite dazzled by his father's eloquence. Though he might well have replied with valid arguments, he remained, all the same, bewildered at the magnificent power of wealth. How Dartigues had showered in cascades a stream of gold on his head! What a change, too, in the conditions of his life! Possessed that very morning of his usual five hundred francs per month, he now felt in his pocket the cheque-book, in which he had only a few words to write to obtain control of a hundred thousand francs! And other sums to follow! His father had said to him that it was one's duty to spend. Just the opposite to the theory of Appel, who was never tired of repeating that it was one's duty to be economical! True, the savant only economized in order to give the more.

But Dartigues also gave; and, like Appel, affirmed that he needed nothing. These two men, so different in ideas and temperament, had reached the same conclusion: the fortune earned by the individual to be placed at the service of the masses. 'Ah! is not that collectivism?' thought Pierre. In a way, but not the one recommended by Des Barres. Still, which of these three men, equally powerful, useful, and inter-

esting, is right? A feeling of pride came over him as he said, almost aloud:

'My father, at any rate, is the most seductive!'

Ah! how well Dartigues knew how to influence the minds of those he came into contact with! In his son's brain he had already sown the seeds which were to grow up all of a sudden, and choke all the old growths. How well he was acquainted with this science of persuasion, this eternal cajoler who had undertaken to win over to his side his own son!

Then another image entered Pierre's mind: Bella, the daughter of his father's second wife, with her flashing eyes and languishing smile. How delightfully beautiful she was in the moonlight, as they promenaded to and fro along the terrace. What a charm there was in this primitive young mind, and how sweet to tell her all she was ignorant of in this old Europe! Pierre dreamily wondered whether, in this return of his father, everything was not concurring to modify his resolutions and hopes.

Was this rich young girl, heiress of a President, the one who was destined to be loved by the young democrat who had been educated and brought up by Appel and Des Barres? What irony in such a fate, which brought him face to face with his own principles by imposing on him the most violent temptations! For there was not the slightest doubt that he was accessible to the seductive influences brought to bear on him, and already there was not the same uncompromising attitude in his ideas. After all, what had happened was only natural. The American uncle dream was being realized in his case, the only difference being that it was his father who had returned to

enrich him. Could he look upon it as a catastrophe that Dartigues had not perished after leaving Europe? And, with Dartigues living, was it not quite natural that there should be some change in his son's mode of living? And this change consisted in a fortune reckoned at several millions. But then, as his father had said, inheritance had not been abolished. And Dartigues' heir approached Bella just in the same degree as Appel's son vanished away. Pierre, dowered by his father, would be a very advantageous match for the ravishing American girl. Altogether the future seemed full of promise.

Turning over these thoughts in his mind, he reached the door of his hotel. He entered the room of the landlord, who, taking from a box near the door a blue paper, said :

'M. Appel, here is a telegram for you!'

This name, now given to Pierre just as he was thinking of all the advantage he would gain in being called Dartigues, found a painful echo in his heart. He took up the telegram without a word, and mounted to his room. The servant immediately entered with a light. Tearing open the paper, he read :

'Uneasy about you. Wish to see you. Return without losing a moment. Best love.—APPEL.'

Falling into an armchair, he sat there, sunk in reverie, the telegram in his hand. Once more he saw in imagination the quiet, peaceful home in the Rue du Luxembourg. What a difference between these restful surroundings, so propitious to meditation and study, and his father's noisy palace, the feverish and turbulent activity of which seemed to banish all idea of repose.

In his anxiety, Pierre began to examine himself with quite a strange feeling of reserve. He seemed afraid of discussing the situation, as though the inevitable solution must be a disastrous one for him. In whichever way he decided, he saw no issue free from difficulty. Seated there in the silence of his room, hesitating for the first time in his life, and far from those whose advice he was accustomed to ask, like a lost mariner, without a compass, on a sea bristling with hidden reefs, he thought carefully over the situation. A series of taps at the door drew him from his torpor. In a sulky voice he said :

'Come in !'

The door opened, and a woman's smiling face appeared on the threshold. Tall and blonde, wearing an elegant travelling dress, she held out her hand, and said :

'They told me number seven ! So here I am. Good-morning. How are you ?'

The dreamer suddenly sprang to his feet and welcomed his visitor with glad surprise :

'Amandine ! What a wonder to see you here !'

'Yes, I came by the express from Marseilles. I descended at Arles and took a cab for Maillane. I am on business. As I saw your name on the visitors' list, and was bored to death in this quiet place, I took the liberty of calling on you.'

'Certainly. So you are here on business ?'

'Yes. Give me a cigarette. . . . It appears you are dabbling in politics here ? Ah ! I have been sounding the landlord, and am quite *au courant* with this election affair. Besides, I am interested in a friend of mine who is also working for the election, the only

difference being that he is on the side of M. de Maillane, whilst you are devoted to the cause of Des Barres.'

'And his name is . . . ?'

'Rémançon.'

At that moment the servant entered bearing a tray which she placed on the table. Pierre began to prepare a regular cross-examination, for he considered as really providential the arrival of this young creature who was prepared to inform him as to the moral worth of his father's friends. Would he not in this way obtain very definite notions as to what he might expect from a definite *rapprochement* with one whose existence he had been in ignorance of for the past twenty years? The servant had left the room, and Amandine began to pour the tea into the cups. With her white fingers, laden with rings, she took up the sugar-tongs.

'How many pieces?' she asked. 'Two?'

'Two. Is that tea?'

'So it seems, but I would not swear as to its quality. . . . So you are here to assure the triumph of Des Barres? How are you going to do it? You will have everybody against you: clergy, business men, officials. What are you relying on?'

'On the people.'

'Ah! it is nice to hear you say that! But then, you well know how the mob is managed. If you promise them enough, you can obtain anything, and Heaven knows what promises the other side is giving! What else could you expect from Rémançon and Barandet, without mentioning the candidate himself, M. de Maillane?'

'Tell me about him.'

'Ah! I say! Do you want me to betray professional secrets?'

'You can do so for my sake. Then you know Maillane?'

'By sight only. Rémançon speaks of no one else. When he is on the subject of his friend, you would imagine there was no finer man in the world. I believe that Maillane has contributed largely towards Rémançon's fortune. . . . Maillane has been connected with all kinds of affairs railways, ports, towns! They build everything. Order from them a terrestrial paradise, and they will manufacture it for you. But it would cost you something!'

'Then they are dishonest?' asked Pierre in trembling accents.

'Dishonest? Why dishonest? They work. Besides, one must have no scruples in business, otherwise you are swindled. Imagine a case: You undertake a contract with another man. You say to yourself: "If I do not get the better of him, he will get the better of me." And in such a spirit you enter into the matter, but all that does not prevent your being a decent fellow!'

'Rather facile morality!' said Pierre, with a smile.

'Come, now, you surely make no pretence of changing the times in which you live? You know that they must be taken as they are. The greatest misfortune for a man nowadays is for him to be a simpleton; people will excuse anything except stupidity. Every day I hear this kind of thing: "You know such a one, who acted so nobly, so delicately under such and such circumstances?" "Yes." "Well, he is bankrupt." "Indeed! Poor fellow! Just think!" "Yes, a very good fellow!

Very upright! But weak!" That is the funeral oration of the man who is very honest and upright. He was weak! Certainly, I would recommend no one to act like a rascal, but one must not quietly submit, like a sheep, to let the wool be shorn off one's back. It is a very fine thing to be an apostle and to preach virtue, and it is even sublime to follow out such teachings. But beware of the funeral oration pronounced by those cunning rascals whose only preoccupation has been the attaining of their end: "Noble heart! But weak!" The whole law of life is included in that phrase. Better if people were to say of you, "He is as cruel as a savage!" than, "He is a weak fellow!"'

'Then Rémançon and his friends will stop at no scruples?'

'I should think not. Besides, at the height of success they have reached, no one ever thinks of discussing. Only petty malefactors are condemned, whilst great and influential ones are worshipped. What is the use of discussing people who own millions? Such a course is either puerile or electoral. But where will it end? Nowhere. Maillane will be elected, and Des Barres, with all his sociology . . . that's what you call it, don't you? . . . will be thrown.'

Pierre did not discuss the point. Had anyone, a week earlier, admitted in his presence the possibility of a check for Des Barres, he would have had a virulent reply to give. But now he said not a word. What progress he had made in a single week! He was tortured by the necessity of obtaining information on points he was ignorant of concerning his father. And yet he was ashamed to ask the question. Besides, suspicions might be aroused. To refrain from ques-

tioning was to miss an opportunity, unique perhaps, of learning what he was so anxious about. Finally he hazarded the remark :

'M. de Maillane is married. . . . Has he a daughter ? . . .'

'Not his own. She is the progeniture of a kind of guerilla, dressed up as a general, in command at Paraguay, Uruguay, or some such place. . . . He, Maillane, is only the second husband. . . .'

'But was he not married before wedding this widow ?'

'I have heard something of that. . . . But, I say, you are making me say too much. . . . You will not take advantage of what I am telling you in confidence to publish all this in the journals ? . . .'

'No, no ! Of course not !'

'Then I will tell you. . . . One day, Rémançon, when in the company of Barandet, alluded to Maillane's past. . . .'

'What did he say about it ?'

'That he had had considerable difficulty in succeeding. . . . He made quite an ordinary start in life as a workman, and had to endure a great deal of misery and deception. For years he spent a wretched life without being able to strike the right path. But he had a wonderful tenacity; he was certain of final success, and confident in his destiny. At night he would fall asleep dreaming of success on the morrow. . . .'

'Poor man !'

'Ah ! you are pitying him now ? . . .'

'Has he not suffered ?'

'No more than others do. If I were to tell you what

catastrophes had befallen my own parents! Just think, my mother . . .'

'No! Tell me about Maillane. . . . He had a wife. . . . What became of her?'

'That is a mystery. Barandet spoke in lowered tones when he mentioned Maillane's first wife, and Rémançon acted like a sexton whispering in a church. . . .'

'Why?'

'I don't know.'

'Did they seem as though they did not think too well of this first wife?'

'I imagined so!'

Pierre turned pale. He ground his teeth and clenched his fists in his despair. A heavy silence succeeded, which Amandine felt it incumbent upon her to break.

'I should not be surprised if Maillane was rather unfortunate in his first marriage. . . .'

'Enough!' exclaimed Pierre, so abruptly that the girl looked at him in surprise.

'What is the matter with you? You wanted to know everything, and now you will listen to nothing more. . . .'

'No! Not a word!'

'How strange you are! You never think or act like another man. Well, well, I cannot stay any longer. It is time for me to leave.'

Thereupon she took her departure. He, slightly excited by what he had heard, paced up and down his room. He thought: 'After all, my secret will belong to me alone.' Sitting down, he took from his pocket the telegram he had received, and read it once more,

very attentively. 'So they are anxious about me in Paris? How can they help being? The doctor and my mother, with that delicate tact of theirs, must have felt a kind of *contre-coup* of what is troubling me. They summon me to their side. Must I obey them? What ought to be my attitude with regard to them, since I know nothing of the past? Between my father and mother, what solution shall I come to? Will not an explanation be necessary? That is the worst thing that could happen.'

He fell into a painful reverie. The situation now offered itself, precise and clear in his mind, without any sentimental setting. On the one side his mother remarried to Appel, and on the other his father remarried to the American widow. And there he was, between the two sides which were preparing for the strife, with his heart as battlefield. Which side should he acknowledge to be in the right? Towards which should he incline? All had valid claims on his choice: his mother, ever since his birth, had tenderly loved him; Appel had shown himself a most admirable and noble-hearted instructor and educator. His father had won him over by the warmth of his temperament and the grace of his character, whilst in his house he had a very powerful and redoubtable ally: the dark-haired Bella with her flashing eyes and gentle smile. Between these two camps he was pulled about and tortured by his conscience and his hopes. He never even troubled about putting to himself the dreaded question which was to decide everything: In this separation between my father and my mother, who has been in the wrong, whom shall I free from all blame?'

His conscience cried aloud: 'Your mother is free

from all shadow of suspicion; she is the very incarnation of virtue and devotion.' His desires replied: 'Your father cannot have anything to reproach himself for. If you must accuse him, you will be renouncing both him and Bella at the same time. Then what would become of you? To do him justice, it must be confessed that the money question never once entered his mind, and that he made no calculation as to whether it was more to his interest to please Dartigues than to sacrifice Appel. The struggle was an absolutely moral one; his purified thoughts rose to the loftiest conceptions of human dignity.

He came out of the struggle without having obtained any result. He suffered; it could not have been otherwise so long as he remained in ignorance as to what he had to learn that affected him so deeply. In the midst of this obscurity, which covered the past, he bitterly cursed whatever disagreement it was that had destroyed the family unity. He now had brought home to him by cruel experience things he had often discussed in theory with Des Barres, solving the problem without any difficulty by means of social considerations which are very fine in words, though anything but acceptable in reality. He saw what all this was: a family destroyed by divorce, and reconstituted in the course of existence, by leaving children to chance, like floating timber after a shipwreck. Tossed about between the two reefs to which the necessities of life continually brought him back, he saw before his eyes no light whatever to serve him as guide. He dared not take sides, he did not wish to decide, and felt miserable in this state of indecision.

CHAPTER VII

SCARCELY had Pierre left Dartigues' study than Claude Brun, as though he had been listening, entered. He wore that sly, threatening look which might have made one compare him to a fox. Taking a seat, after a steady look at Dartigues, he said :

'Well, how far have you got in your conquest? Does the young man rise to the bait?'

'Ah! Up to the present I have had very little to do. He is a fine young fellow; his heart expands with a facility which at once ravishes and troubles me. . . .'

'I don't understand. Explain yourself.'

'It is easy enough to understand. I am pleased to see Pierre become attached to me, and sorry to have been so long deprived of his affection.'

'Are you becoming elegiac?'

'I have always been of a sensitive nature.'

'Since you have become rich, perhaps, though formerly you were ferocious enough, in all conscience. Assume any attitude you like before those who do not know you. Before me it is useless, you know.'

'Do you think I have no heart?'

'Why should you not have a heart? I have one, have I not?'

Silence fell between the two men. Dartigues walked

to and fro in his study, as though he wished to postpone the conversation he saw on the point of being commenced. But Claude would not permit this. He took the offensive.

'What have you promised this young fellow, to have won him over so completely in a week? I well know how seductive you are, when you like to be so. But it is no easy matter to make a son forget that he has been abandoned for twenty years by his father. And however great your powers of seduction, I imagine the task would be beyond you. Accordingly, you must have used some very powerful argument to abolish memory in this young man's brain.'

'All I have done has been to tell him that I loved him. . . .'

'And he believed you? What touching confidence!'

'How could he imagine that I should deceive him?'

'Were he to reflect for a single moment, he would not have the slightest doubt on the matter.'

'Why should he not believe me?'

'Because you have only remembered him at a time when it was to your interest to do so.'

Dartigues made no reply. He continued to promenade to and fro, as though to dissipate the impression of his companion's cutting criticisms.

'Apparently, what you say is true,' he said after a moment's pause. 'In reality, it is false, as you are well aware. . . . But you are trying to pick a quarrel with me. . . .'

'Well, I will explain myself clearly, for there must be no misunderstanding. I will not let you proceed farther along the path you have already commenced without being fixed as to your intentions. . . .'

'My intentions concerning what? . . .'

'Your intentions concerning Bella.'

This time Dartigues sat down. He lit a cigar, and, without allowing his countenance, which was generally so expressive, to manifest the slightest curiosity or impatience, he listened. The other turned pale with anger in presence of this cool attitude. But he also knew how to dominate himself, and in mellow tones he began:

'When we arrived at Maillane, a fortnight ago, the sentiments your step-daughter had inspired in me were no secret to you. . . . I have never concealed from you the keen affection I had for her. Ever since leaving America, you have known this, and have never made the slightest attempt to dissuade me from loving Mlle. Hermandez. . . . Is this true?'

'Quite true. But you must add that I have never given you the slightest encouragement. . . .'

'That objection has no value whatever, for neutrality implied goodwill. From the fact that you did not cut me short, I regarded it as a tacit permission to go ahead. And, indeed, what did it matter to you whether I loved her or not? Why should you have been opposed to it? She is without fortune, for her mother has seized hold of everything the General possessed. The difference of age between us? What did that matter to you, who regard women with such scorn that you look upon them as a mere element of amusement and distraction in life? . . . For this step-daughter of yours you have no more tenderness than for any other person you might be in the habit of seeing around you. . . . So that it must evidently have been quite indifferent to you whether or not I fell in

love with Bella, and thought of marrying her, though I am forty-five years of age, and she only twenty. Your friendship for me ought even to have induced you to favour my plans, since this union would have, in a certain measure, repaid me for all the services I have rendered you, and bound more closely together the links which attach us to one another. Things were in this state up to our arrival in Maillane, but now, suddenly, all is changed, your combinations have been overthrown, and instead of favouring me, you have begun to betray me.'

'On behalf of whom?' asked Dartigues calmly.

'On behalf of your son.'

'You are mad! Whatever can have startled you? Pierre and I have never even mentioned the subject. I have formed no plan whatever, and what you are saying now exists merely in your own imagination. . . .'

'Nonsense! I have eyes to see, and have no difficulty in understanding what I do see. . . .'

'And what is it you see, may I ask?'

'Under your complaisant patronage, I see love springing up in the heart of Pierre, who is doing all he can to win Bella. I see them talking together, in accents of mutual confidence, the commencement of a union of their two wills. I see them walking about the park arm in arm, and I can guess all they are saying to one another. . . . You too, you see all this, and, knowing my hopes, you do nothing to prevent it. You even smile, like a good-natured paterfamilias. . . . You yourself, my dear Dartigues, you have been engaged in vile professions, and I, at any rate, who know you thoroughly, do not regard you as a model of virtue.'

On being thus roughly reminded of past days of infamy and wretchedness, the millionaire made a gesture of anger, which he immediately repressed. Biting his lips, he shook off the ashes of his cigar, and said grimly :

'I afterwards did a great deal of good to expiate the wrongs I had committed. But how can you bring such reproaches against me, for you were my evil counsellor in everything ?'

Claude drew close to his companion.

'I bring these deeds back to your mind to make you feel that our common life of adventure has indissolubly bound us to one another, and that it is very imprudent of you, on the day of triumph, to think of betraying me.'

'You are threatening me ?'

'I am simply giving you warning. You seem to be taking seriously all this apparent bourgeois wisdom you have assumed. Deceive the general herd of men, obtain from them a reputation of virtue, and I will not offer the slightest opposition, but rather encourage you. If, however, you think you can cheat me, who know who you are in your real character, then, let me tell you, I will not endure it for a moment.'

'But after all, what is it you want ? All these recriminations are certainly not platonic ; you have some conclusion or other ready. . . .'

'You are right. I want you to tell Bella that there is nothing to be done with Pierre, and Pierre that he must not think of Bella.'

'Eh ! Am I the controller of their sentiments ?'

'You may be, if you like. It is mere child's play for you to upset the calculations of these two lovers. . . .'

'In other words, you expect me to impose on myself the sacrifice of Bella and Pierre in your favour.'

'After having served you all my life and under all kinds of circumstances, I expect you to serve me a single time on this occasion.'

'You wish me to induce Bella to become your wife?'

A dark-red flush mounted to Claude Brun's face, whilst a keen light shone in his eyes.

'Yes. I love her! I love her! It is the last passion of my life, more powerful and imperious than all the rest. . . . I would sacrifice everything for this child. . . . I am sure I could win her heart by my perseverance, and captivate her mind by my generosity. I am very wealthy, as you know. . . . All I possess shall be hers. To win her favour, I would increase my fortune tenfold. . . . Ah! I can form gigantic plans when I think of her; I would ruin the whole earth to offer her its treasures. . . . But you must remove Pierre while there is yet time. If he remains here he will take her from me, and then I do not know what I should be capable of doing, in my despair.'

Dartigues had listened to the end with perfect calm. When Claude, now almost a suppliant at his feet, had finished, he looked at him with a disdainful smile.

'Just to think of the effect of senile love on an intelligent man! Look at yourself, Claude; look at your wrinkles and gray hair; reckon up the years you have lived, those terrible years of struggle and poverty which count treble, for during such a time one spends all one's intellectual and physical energy, issuing from the strife utterly worn out in every plane. You are in love—you? Poor fellow! Then you have not suffered enough, and now that your hard life is at an

end, you want to continue your sufferings ? You are mad ! Where do you imagine such a state of things will bring you ? Just suppose, for a single moment, that we succeeded in effecting this marriage you are so eager for. Have you thought of the morrow ? You speak of your love ! Imagine, if you can, what your jealousy would be. Twenty years of age on the one hand, and forty-five on the other. . . . Beautiful union indeed ! and what would it produce ? Utter disgust on the part of the wife, unbridled fury on that of the husband. It would be a life of storm and violence. And yet it is such a state of things you are dreaming of ! I tell you, you are mad !'

'But it is a madness filled with joy !'

'It would be an evil that nothing could ever remedy !'

'What have I to do with the future ? I can think only of one day : that on which I shall marry Bella.'

'Can I compel her to give herself to you ?'

'Yes ; you know well you can. You have never had the slightest doubt of it, ever since the day when you changed your ideas. Oh, take care ! Do not deceive me ! . . . You know what I am capable of. . . . I will leave no stone unturned to accomplish my desire. . . .'

Dartigues rose from his seat, crossed over to Claude, and placing his hand on his companion's shoulder, said :

'Enough ! Your explanation is complete ! You seem to have forgotten that, though you represent cunning, I am the incarnation of might. You carried me off twenty years ago, but ever since that day it has always been I who have had the oar in hand, I who have made the boat advance. And if it has landed me on a lucky strand, it is I who have guided

it there, amid shoals and dangers of every kind. Whatever you are, you owe to me. Whatever you possess, it is I who have given it you. You have no being of your own; you are merely an emanation from me. No one knows Claude Brun. . . . He is a mere subordinate. There is only one chief, one master, and his name is Maillane. You at any rate ought not to have forgotten this, for it was you who invented this new name.'

Brun, trembling with passion, stammered forth:

'So this is how you treat me, your companion, your ally! . . .'

'You renounce the alliance, and reject the companionship.'

'I ask you for happiness.'

'You disturb my own arrangements. . . .'

'Ah! Then you confess at last? . . .'

'That I would gladly see my son marry Bella? Do you think I am such a fool as not to see how advantageous such an alliance would be for me? You have been proving to me, for the last hour, the utility of such a course. . . .'

'Then you mock me in the bargain?'

'What! Do you expect me to fly into a passion? This madness of yours is really not worth it. . . . Now listen to me. I am sorry for you. I see you in such a state of distress that I should reproach myself if I were not to give you an opportunity of realizing your desires. . . . Bella is quite free; you may be certain I shall not influence her. . . . Speak to her. Make her the offer of your name and fortune. . . . Ask her to become your wife. . . . I authorize you to do so.'

'Ah! you are quite well aware that I have no hope of success without your help. . . .'

'And so you expect me to say to the child: "Marry this old man because he is my friend and ally, and is rich in addition"? If you have such a bargain to propose, then undertake the transaction yourself. Oh! there is more than one young girl who would accept your offer. . . . It is quite in accordance with modern ideas to consider marriage from the point of view of material advantage alone. A man of forty-five, possessed of millions, and with other millions in prospect, is not a match to be disdained. . . . I do not see why you should not manage the affair yourself. . . . How do you know you may not succeed? Picture to Bella what a fine future she will assure for herself by marrying you. Who knows whether she will not prefer the solid realities of life to all the promises of love?'

'You are well aware that Pierre will have something besides his heart to offer. He is your son. . . .'

'You are right!' exclaimed Dartigues, 'and I intend to portion him, if only I can get him to consent, for M. Pierre is anything but an accommodating kind of person, with those socialistic ideas of his. It is not easy to get him to see things from my point of view.'

A passing flush came over Claude's pale face. A ray of hope had crossed his mind. How would this suspicious son, who resisted his father, of whom he knew so little, receive favours from him, if ever he were to learn the whole truth? If he merely knew what acts of atrocity and exaction had formed the basis of the President's fortune, would he be willing to enter the

family of such a monster? Brun saw that a whole campaign must be entered upon to circumvent Pierre, if he failed with regard to Bella. The thought came to him that with scrupulous people nothing is ever lost, and that, if honesty was of any value to Dartigues' son, it would doubtless be possible, by means of certain well-chosen items of information, to remove him from his father and Mlle. Hermandez. His cunning face resumed an expression of placidity, and, in gentler tones, he said:

'Well, let things remain as they are! I will accept a condition of neutrality on your part, since that is the utmost I can obtain from your friendship. I will speak to Bella. And if she refuses me, at all events I shall not have the grief of thinking that it is to you I shall owe my failure. . . .'

'There, that is right! Now you are in your right mind once more. . . . If you are so fond of the little one, try to win her with her own consent. . . . I will sacrifice in your favour whatever advantages I should have found in a marriage between Pierre and Mlle. Hermandez. You see, I am quite ready to be accommodating. You ought to blush now for the scolding words you have been uttering. . . .'

'I know what your promises mean,' said Claude, with a shake of the head, 'but I shall judge you by your deeds. We shall see if the two are in conformity with one another.'

'Don't think I wish to deceive you; I would not even give myself the trouble of doing so. . . . It shall be as I have said. . . . And now it is time to retire. I am sure the ladies must already have withdrawn.'

They crossed the salon, which, in effect, was empty,

and after a cordial handshake, they separated. The following morning, about eleven o'clock, Pierre, on reaching Maillane for lunch, as had been his habit the past fortnight, as he crossed the garden, met Bella, who, armed with pruning-shears, was cutting off twigs of mimosa and roses, the first of the season. She wore a simple white dress and tanned boots. A small red head-dress covered her raven hair, whilst a pair of thick leather gloves protected her hands against the thorns. She allowed Pierre to approach as she continued her work, though not without casting a rapid glance at him. He seemed anxious, and traces of the uneasy night he had spent were visible on his face. A smile overspread his face, however, as he bowed to Bella, and the light of love shone in his limpid blue eyes.

'What is the matter with you?' asked the young girl, with that half-savage frankness of hers. 'Are you in trouble? Tell me all about it. You know, we are to have no secrets from one another.'

She examined him as she spoke, without the slightest coquetry, but with affectionate sincerity. He replied immediately:

'I have received a telegram summoning me back to Paris.'

'No bad news, I hope?'

'No; but you well know I shall be sorry to leave. That is why I feel sad.'

'Who has sent you this telegram? Your mother?'

'Yes, my mother.'

'She wants to see you again. It is nothing but natural. How long has she been separated from you?'

'Two months.'

'And you have never left her before?'

'Never.'

'Is she very fond of you?'

'As fond as I am of her.'

'You love her more than all else in the world?'

He looked at Bella, who smiled with provoking grace as she uttered these words. Finally he replied:

'A fortnight ago I could indeed have said more than all else in the world.'

'And you dare not say it now, Pierre?'

'No, Bella, for it is no longer the truth.'

'Is it your father who has brought about this change in your heart?'

He lowered his head, and gave no reply.

'Is she still young, your mother?' asked the young girl. 'She must be charming. . . .'

'Yes, still young, and charming indeed. But her hair is quite white. . . . She has had a great deal of trouble and difficulty in life. . . .'

Bella raised her beautiful eyes, and fixed them on Pierre with a friendly smile. She shook her head, as though there had entered her mind questions she did not wish to ask, then abruptly changing the conversation, she said:

'Then this is a day of trouble for both of us. If you have had your share, I, too, have had mine.'

'How can that be possible here, where you pass a quiet life under the affectionate guardianship of my father, and your mother's tender care?'

'Ah! it is a serious matter! And I do not know whether I should be doing right in mentioning it to you. But since we have promised to have no secrets from one another, I will tell you.' Assuming an air of

importance, she said in mysterious accents: 'This morning I received an offer of marriage. . . .'

'Here?'

'Yes, here.'

'From whom? There is no one here who is a suitable match for you. . . .'

'Ah! you think so? Well, everybody does not think in the same way. . . . Besides, you must not be so scornful. The man in question is a very important personage, and extremely wealthy. . . .'

'Oh, Bella, can that have any influence over you?'

'Certainly,' she said, with great simplicity. 'I have never lived apart from luxury and abundance, and I should suffer cruelly at finding myself in an ordinary position in life. When I was quite a child, my father was as powerful as a king. I grew up in his palace, surrounded by obedient servants and courtiers. My playground consisted of the gardens of the Presidency, with their groves filled with the rarest of flowers, whilst the air was alive with the warbling of birds. Gay and charming quadroon girls accompanied me everywhere, and I am quite accustomed to all the fastidious brilliancy of sovereign rank. When my father died, and we were obliged to leave the palace, my mother and I went on board a warship, accompanied by a princely escort, and, on reaching Chili, where we had taken refuge, we found ourselves as rich as ever. It is only since my mother's marriage with M. de Maillane that our life has become more modest, not because our resources were less, but because your father did not wish to attract attention. But within doors we have always had a profusion of everything, so that I have not changed my habits in any way. As you now see, I

have been brought up like one who will never have occasion to resist any fancy, however costly, or to refrain from satisfying any caprice, however unreasonable. You see, such an education has not been a very good one, according to your French ideas, but then, it is that of all the rich girls in my country. So you may imagine that, if I were obliged at a moment's notice to restrict myself to ordinary-life economy, it would be a very disagreeable change for me. Accordingly, there is no need to ridicule wealth in a suitor, for it is a very worthy quality.'

'But it is not the most important, in your eyes?'

'Certainly not.'

'Youth, talent, and love must count something. . . .'

'Talent and love, certainly. . . . But is youth so indispensable? When General Diego Hermandez married my mother, he was a gray-bearded man of fifty. . . . But he was at the head of the nation, and he was passionately in love. So much for talent and love. . . . My mother never troubled about his age: he was a hero. . . . He had just destroyed three armies. . . . She never looked at his wrinkles, but was indeed dazzled by his glory. . . . And at the age of sixteen she became the wife of the dictator. . . .'

'But is this a hero who has offered to marry you?'

'No. Heroes are very scarce. He is only a very clever business man, who has made a great fortune, is passionately in love with me, and is willing to give me all he possesses. . . .'

'Do you need it?'

'I have nothing at all.'

'But your mother . . .'

'My mother is quite young; she is only thirty-six

years of age. She will give me a dot. . . . But what will that amount to? A few hundred thousand francs. . . . She, too, had nothing when General Hermandez offered her his hand. . . . Besides, she could not help accepting him, for the dictator would certainly have shot a rival. No one ever thought of resisting him!'

'But, my dear Bella, we are now in France, where marriages are contracted freely, and where it is forbidden to kill people who are in the way. Besides, there would be too much to do! Accordingly, you are mistress of your own will. What! You did not immediately repudiate with horror the proposition you have received?'

'No, I determined to consult you first.'

'Good! Well, you see, I give you no uncertain opinion.'

'So I see, and you defend it with considerable warmth.'

'How could I do otherwise? To think of a charming girl like you handed over to an old man because he happens to be rich. That would be the most abominable bargain one could conceive of! You would be selling your youth and beauty, and for what in return? For money! You have no feeling of revolt at the idea?'

'In our country we are still so little removed from a condition of slavery that we look upon the position from quite a special standpoint. . . . It does not appear very extraordinary, not humiliating, at any rate, for a man to buy a wife.'

'Granted that she be sold; but, in any case, we must draw the line at the point where she thinks of selling herself.'

She looked at him, moved by the violence of his protests.

'Then I must refuse?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'I have told you.'

'No, you have not given me all your reasons.'

Her beautiful lips were wreathed in a smile, and at that moment she appeared so beautiful that Pierre threw to the winds all reserve. Taking the young girl's hands in his own, he drew her to his side, and said softly:

'You must refuse, Bella, so as to keep yourself for me, for I could not live without you. You must refuse, because I should be in despair, and miserable all my life, if you were to belong to another. All the arguments I have given you are worth very little, the only one worth anything is this: I love you.'

Raising her eyes, she looked tenderly at Pierre, and gave his hand a slight pressure in token of agreement.

'That is, indeed, a good reason. Accordingly, as you wish, I will refuse. But you are very poor, Pierre, as I am. What shall we do for a living?'

'We will replace luxury by happiness.'

Bella said gaily:

'Besides, your father is very fond of you, and there are so many millions of francs in the house that he and my mother may well be willing to give us a few. Just sufficient to keep the wolf from the door.'

A cloud came over Pierre's brow.

'Then you would not be willing to make a sacrifice for the one you loved?' he asked seriously. 'It is so easy to deprive one's self of superfluities which now

seem indispensable. . . . You will see, Bella . . . a simple life is a very attractive one. . . . Luxury constitutes a great burden. . . .'

'Ah! you speak like a priest!' exclaimed the young girl. 'When we were living at Santiago, there was a priest named Antonio, who preached at the Chapel of the Evangelist, and who said as you do: No luxury, nothing but privation! Whenever he came to dine at the palace, my mother would watch him as he religiously drank his Alicante, and never failed to say to him: "Ah, Padre Antonio! Alicante is a very luxurious wine! Privation! Privation!" But he continued sipping his wine, without seeming to hear what she said. Leave privations to others, my dear Pierre, if they are obliged to undergo them. And let us drink the Alicante of the house, like Padre Antonio!'

She spoke with such a smiling and contented air that the lovesick Pierre had not sufficient courage to oppose her. She loved him: what more than that did he desire? He took her arm and passed it beneath his own, as they walked slowly past the rose-trees which filled the morning air with their fragrant odour. After a moment's pause he said:

'You have not yet told me who it was who made you this offer of marriage.'

'Is it necessary that you should know?'

'It will be easy for me to guess. Those who are staying here are not very numerous. We will eliminate at once M. Rémançon. Barandet and Claude Brun are left. It is not Barandet?'

'No.'

'Then it is the other.'

For a moment he stood there pensive; then, in serious tones, said:

'Yes, indeed, he must be taken into consideration. I cannot look upon him as an indifferent person, but rather as one to be dreaded. Love is the height of madness in a man of his age. What reply did you give him?'

'That I was not my own mistress in the matter.'

'Did he not insist on knowing more?'

'Obstinately, almost importunately. He was beside himself. But I am not easily intimidated, and his entreaties did not trouble me in the least. I was indifferent, for his voice could not touch my heart. . . .'

'Then your heart belonged already to another?'

'Probably!'

'Dear Bella!'

They had reached the terrace in front of the château. The young girl holding up her basket filled with mimosa and roses, pointed to a window on the first-floor, and said:

'There is my mother watching us. . . . I warn you now that I am going to tell her everything.'

'And I, too, I will go at once and speak to my father.'

They separated, their faces beaming with a radiant smile. Pierre crossed the hall, his eyes fixed on Bella as she mounted the staircase with light, graceful steps. When she was out of sight, he entered the salon, and, without knocking, opened the door of Dartigues' study. A man sat writing at the desk. The latter looked up, and Pierre, with no small annoyance, recognised Claude Brun. The latter pushed on one side the papers lying in front of him, and slowly twisting

round in the armchair on which he was seated, came face to face with Pierre. He looked at him very attentively, as though he would have liked to read his thoughts. Then, pointing to a seat near the fireplace, he said :

'You expected to find your father here ? You will not see him before luncheon. He has been obliged to go to the station. . . . Doubtless he will be leaving for Paris in a few days.'

'Alone ?'

'No, with all his family. Mme. de Maillane is anxious to open the fine mansions in the Avenue Hoche, and to show her daughter the capital.'

Pierre blushed; he imagined that Claude must be smiling mockingly. Would not Bella, surrounded by the luxurious life of Paris, change her mind ? She was only too disposed to appreciate brilliant scenes, as she had so innocently confessed to Pierre. Her simple, candid love alone struggled against her native frivolity. Might she not again be overcome by the taste for princely splendour, a flattering picture of which she had drawn for her friend with such complacency ? Would not Bella, won over by the vain and frivolous existence of the rich, be lost to him ? The thought came to him that the reason Claude Brun was looking at him with that ironical expression was that he was of the opinion that the stifling atmosphere of Paris would kill this poor little flower of love that had sprung up in Bella's heart.

'You have just been speaking to Mlle. Hermandez,' continued Claude. 'Did she not mention this change ?'

'No.'

'Then you were engaged on such interesting topics that she forgot. . . . Or perhaps her mother has neglected to inform her of it. . . . The main point, however, is that she is leaving.'

Pierre summoned up courage, and determined to provoke an explanation, he asked abruptly:

'The main point for whom?'

Claude Brun moved not a muscle of his face. Stretching his arms, he closed his eyes, and replied:

'For her, for Bella, for Mlle. Hermandez. . . . It is her interest alone I am thinking of. I care nothing for anything else.'

'I know.'

A flash of light, keen and piercing as an arrow, came from beneath Claude's eyelids.

'Ah! then she has told you?'

'A moment ago.'

'Whilst you were gathering roses together? This is a sign of a great confidence. . . .'

'You are astonished?'

'No, I am jealous.'

They looked at one another in silence, the one proudly drawing up his handsome figure, the other, with mock humility, inclining his gray head.

'Ah! you have many advantages, young man. And I sometimes ask myself whether it would not be better for me to disappear, instead of entering the lists against you. For we are fighting for the same woman, alas! and our chances are very different. . . . Yours are great, mine only moderate. If I were not certain that Bella's interests required me to persist in my suit, I should already have left the field free for you. But, for her happiness, I do not

think that she should marry you. . . . No! I am convinced she would not be happy with you. . . . You see how sincere I am!'

A sly, cruel laugh again escaped his lips.

'And why should she not be happy?' asked Pierre.

'Ah! you want me to point out your defects, and show up your weak points? Is it my place to give you a lesson?'

As he spoke thus, he looked at Pierre, and his countenance expressed malice mingled with scorn.

'If you want any information on that matter, you could learn much more from Professor Appel than from myself.'

'Why should the name of Professor Appel be introduced into our conversation, sir?'

'Ah! for many reasons, young man. He is a savant, and an analyst, as well as an eminent physiologist. All the mysteries of human nature are well known to him. He will explain without difficulty the movements of our being, and demonstrate to you by the cleverest possible proof that the step-daughter of Dartigues cannot become the daughter-in-law of Mme. Appel. . . . Don't you believe me? Eh? Well! he will confirm everything I say. Go and consult Professor Appel!'

'I can do without your advice, for I have made up my mind what to do.'

'One should not despise the help of anyone, for each person has his own relative value, and, though this may be considered very small, yet under certain circumstances he may become the arbiter of our fate. If you were to give me good advice, I assure you I should not despise it. . . . It would appear to me

only the more precious, coming from you. But you can do nothing for me, whilst I can do a great deal for you. You are in absolute ignorance about me: who I am, where I came from, and what I have done are all mysteries for you. But I know you, right from the day of your birth down to the present moment. I read in your life as in a book. I can enter into your thoughts, and guess what consequences they must entail. Believe me, young man, it is a great misfortune for everybody concerned that you have entered this house.'

'It is my father's house!' interrupted Pierre.

'Just so, and it is precisely for that very reason that you ought never to have put your foot in it. You are bringing into it discord and suffering as well as shame and disgrace.'

'Disgrace! For whom?'

'You will find out, if you remain obstinate. If you do not leave at once, nothing will avail to avert the evil spell you will have cast on all who live here.'

Pierre burst into a forced laugh, and with a gesture of scorn said:

'It is not difficult to understand your stratagem; but really, you judge me to be far simpler, far more innocent, than I am in reality. Do you expect to terrify me by your mysterious mien and obscure expressions? . . . Nonsense!'

'Naturally!' said Claude Brun quietly. 'There is no instance known of a man having ever profited by the advice given him. Cassandra, on the walls of Troy, prophesied ruin, while the Greeks were in the wooden horse, but the besieged Trojans did nothing but laugh at her warnings. Laugh also, young man; your age will allow of it. But you will not laugh always!'

'Not another word, please,' said Pierre proudly. 'You have found the opportunity to declare to me that we are rivals, and that it would be wiser on my part to give in to you. Were I to follow your advice, I do not think Mlle. Hermandez would be too well satisfied with my docility; she would think very little was needed to make me renounce all hopes of ever obtaining her. That is not my intention. I love her passionately, and if I am obliged to expose myself to certain difficulties, the final victory, which cannot escape me in spite of your evil bodings, will only appear to us the more precious.'

Claude Brun gave an evasive gesture. Rising, he took up the letters he had written, and with a bow to the young man, said:

'You are free to do as you please. I have no power to stop you, when you are on the point of committing a foolish action. Listen! there is the carriage returning with your father. It is not necessary that he find us together. Reflect on what I have said; your best friend would not give you any different advice. If you do not think so now, a day will come when you will be convinced I am right. *Au revoir*, if you are foolish; *adieu*, if you are wise.'

He left Pierre alone in the room. His father's sonorous voice giving orders was already heard in the hall. The door opened, and Dartigues approached with outstretched hand, and a look of affection beaming from his countenance.

'Good-morning. Have you been waiting long?'

'No, father, I have only just come in, after a short walk with Mlle. Hermandez.'

'Ah! ah!'

A benevolent look overspread Dartigues' face, as though he were expecting to hear some confidential news.

'I have been bidding her good-bye,' continued Pierre.

'What? Good-bye? Then you are leaving us?'

'Yes, father, I am obliged to return to Paris.'

The father's face at once became overcast. He had understood what Pierre had refrained from confessing: that he had been recalled by his mother.

'How long will you remain away?'

'I have no idea.'

'At any rate, we shall not be separated for long, for Mme. de Maillane and myself are shortly to leave here and spend the spring in Paris. . . . The ladies are anxious to see the capital.'

'I know.'

'I shall spend my time, you understand, between Paris and Maillane right to the end of the electoral campaign. . . . Was it Bella who told you we were about to leave?'

'No, father, it was M. Claude Brun.'

'Ah! Claude? Then you have met?'

'Yes, father, just now, as I was waiting for you.'

Dartigues turned round, so as to face Pierre, and asked:

'What did he say?'

Pierre replied with rigid firmness:

'That my coming into this house had brought nothing but misfortune.'

'Ah! he said that, did he? The fool! Quite in accord with those wily, prattling ways of his. Misfortune! For whom? For himself, doubtless! Was that all he said?'

'That was the conclusion of our conversation. But he had spoken to Mlle. Hermandez, and was aware that I also had spoken.'

'And he was furious ?'

'No, father, he was quite calm and sarcastic. . . . He informed me that he loved Mlle. Hermandez, and that, in the interest of all concerned, I ought to retire, disappear, and hand her over to him.'

'Then you love her, too ?'

'With all my heart! And the greatest favour I can ask of you is to do all you can to effect my marriage with her.'

'Ah! my dear child! You never doubted my willingness to help you, did you ? Why, if you marry Bella, you will be doubly my son!'

'Ah! then she will be mine!' he exclaimed in joyful accents.

'Yes, if the result depends on me.'

In a moment, these simple words damped Pierre's enthusiasm. He saw once more Claude's dark mocking face as he said: 'Consult Professor Appel.' He remembered, with anguish of heart, that, indeed, it did not depend on Dartigues alone whether he married Bella or not; he had to reckon with a very powerful moral influence. All that there was obscure in his position, which for the past fortnight he had been unable to gauge, suddenly became flooded with light. He saw himself placed between his mother and father, who had been separated for twenty years, indifferent, not to say hostile, to one another—at any rate, devoid of any common opinions or aspirations; in a word, two absolutely different sides, the one doubtless disposed to condemn what the other approved of.

He began to understand his rival's feeling of security, and the meaning of his declarations. Dartigues himself foresaw difficulties in the way, since he had promised Bella to his son 'if the result depended on him.' And yet he had learned what kind of a man his father was, and that, generally speaking, nothing resisted his energy and skill. The difficulties in the way must indeed be great if he could not assure their success. And from what direction could these difficulties come? From his mother and Appel, whose devotion and spirit of sacrifice on his behalf warranted him expecting everything from them.

What was this insurmountable obstacle which sprang up from the past, preventing all agreement between these persons, who, taken separately, were favourable to him? Who was responsible for this lack of united feeling? Whom ought he to suspect of being guilty? whom was he to condemn? Then he remembered, with a shudder, what Amandine had told him in confidence: 'Maillane was not happy in his first marriage.' What! his mother! Tears came into his eyes, and a feeling of intolerable pain came over him. No! that was impossible! The quiet, serious, gray-haired woman, the gentle consoler of his boyish troubles? No! no!

Then his father? . . . His torture consisted in the necessity he was under of accusing the one in order that the other might be proved innocent. He knew nothing, could guess nothing, and, in his ignorance, defiled with his suspicions the two beings whom he wished above all else in the world to respect.

He looked at his father. Having respect for his preoccupation, the painful phases of which he perhaps

mentally followed, Dartigues had taken a seat in front of the desk previously occupied by Claude Brun, and almost unconsciously was drawing pencil marks over a sheet of white paper. Evidently he was not thinking of what he was doing; his hand was moving quite aimlessly. His face had turned pale, whilst from time to time the nerves of his cheeks seemed to quiver. He raised his head as he heard Pierre give a deep sigh, and he saw on his son's face the reflection of his own anguish. There was also a look of fear in his eyes. Rising abruptly, he crossed over to him, took him between his arms, and pressing him to his heart, said in trembling accents:

'What is the matter with you, my dear child?'

Pierre burst into tears, and, with an emotion he no longer attempted to conceal, said:

'I am very anxious, and miserable! . . .'

Dartigues opened his mouth, ready to ask a series of questions, but no sound escaped his lips. He appeared to hesitate before an explanation, which, doubtless, would have been far too difficult for him to give with perfect sincerity. He stood there, without uttering a word, his son clasped to his breast. Finally he said softly:

'Whatever happens, Pierre, promise me you will not forget that I love you?'

'But how could I forget?' asked the young man anxiously.

'Promise me that whatever you hear against me,' continued Dartigues, 'you will believe nothing without giving me an opportunity to explain.'

'What is it you are afraid of, father?' asked Pierre.

'Nothing, if you have confidence in me; everything, if you listen to those whose interest it is to blacken my character in your eyes.'

'And who are they?'

Dartigues shook his head.

'Ah! my dear child, you will learn that only too soon! I do not know what they want, or what they are capable of doing. But I—remember what I am saying—I will sacrifice everything to make you happy!'

On hearing these words, so full of tenderness and love, Pierre seemed to feel that life had returned to his veins. A feeling of elation came into his anxious heart, and, grasping his father's hand, he said:

'Rely on me. I will never forget what you have just promised.'

'When will you leave?'

'Ah! as soon as possible now. Living in such a state of uncertainty cannot truly be called life at all!'

'Then this evening?'

'Yes, this evening.'

Not another word was said, for Mme. de Maillane and Bella had just entered the room.

PART THE THIRD

CHAPTER VIII

In the common-room of Professor Appel's clinic, situated in the very heart of the poorest district in Paris, the consulting hour had almost expired. The medical pupils added to their prescriptions a ticket for medicine, to be paid over to the chemist, and the lady superintendent distributed from large chests of drawers carefully replenished by Mme. Appel new linen, children's clothes, and women's garments bought at charity bazaars. This particular clinic, founded and maintained by Appel, was exclusively reserved for the needy. All the same, it was by no means rare for the rich inhabitants of the district, attracted by the reputation of the Professor, and the ability of his students, to offer themselves for treatment. The door was not closed against them, but a consultation fee was taken, and immediately placed in their presence in the poor-box at the entrance of the waiting-room.

The most illustrious surgeons considered it a favour to operate personally in serious cases. Rameau de Ferrières had often kept merchant princes waiting whilst, with his friend, he attended to the poor and wretched. Appel never failed to put in an appear-

ance, if only for a quarter of an hour, to superintend the work of his students. The latter had been carefully chosen, and they performed with zeal the task committed to their charge. It was considered a great recommendation in the medical world to have formed part of Professor Appel's clinic. These young doctors took a pride, as did their master, in giving their scientific knowledge and attention to poverty-stricken toilers, feeling certain, as they did, that later on they would make the idle and the rich pay for the others.

Appel had just entered his consulting-room, and was carefully questioning a woman carrying in her arms a child, quite pale and sickly-looking. The pupils had reserved this case for the Professor.

Appel had given the woman a seat in front of him, and had taken on his knees the child, whose body he was carefully feeling as he questioned the mother. His handsome though grave face was bent over the poor child's head, as he examined the eyes and lips, and tried to discover the secrets of life and death.

'How old is the father?' he asked.

'Twenty-nine years, doctor. But he works very hard.'

'What trade?'

'Turner in copper. . . .'

'What are his wages?'

'From five to six francs a day.'

'How much does he bring home on Saturday nights?'

The woman made no reply. Appel formed his own conclusion.

'Then he goes to the inn?'

'He is obliged, doctor. The copper gives him a raging thirst—he is obliged to drink! . . .'

'All the harm lies there,' said the savant. 'The child is paying for the father's drinking habits. . . . And he, wretched man, is killing himself just as certainly as though he were drinking poison. . . . But we are dealing with the child only. . . . Where do you live?'

'Rue de l'Estrapade. . . .'

'Neither air nor sunlight, and a sink on each floor. . . . Your child must have country air. . . . There is no organ diseased; he is simply languishing away. We must help the life to defend itself. . . . No medicine; simply a course of hygiene; open-air exercise, etc. . . .'

'But, doctor, we have no means. . . .'

'Where does your husband work?'

'Rue Campagne-Première. . . .'

'Then you must remove to Montrouge. . . . Here is a house-ticket. I will not give you any money, for you would spend it. Go straight to the house-agent whose address I have written on this paper. The rent will be half what you are at present paying. . . . With the other half, your husband can take the tram to go to and from his work. . . . In this way, your child will be able to breathe and move about freely. . . . This is the only hope. . . . And try to get the father to give up the drink. If he only knew and could see the effect produced, he would be cured for ever. . . . But the Government is in complicity with poisoners; it must have taxes, so it allows poison to be sold! And now, my good woman, go and ask the manageress whatever you may be in need of before leaving. . . .'

'Ah, doctor, how can I thank you?'

'By sending me any sick people you know of. Good-bye, madame.'

The study-door opened; a young medical student made his appearance.

'The operation on old Laudit is over,' he said. 'He has been awakened, and is going on well.'

'Is Professor Bérard still there?'

'He is just leaving the operating-room, and is coming to see you.'

At this moment a loud voice was heard, and through the door passed a head surrounded by a mass of shaggy gray hair, and lit up by a pair of magnificent dark eyes, as Guillaume Bérard appeared.

'Here I am; the operation has been quite successful. It was an invagination. On opening it, there was not the faintest trace of appendicitis. . . . And yet the temperature was so high that there was bound to be an inflammation somewhere. . . . Finally, I discovered what was the matter. . . . It is the most extraordinary operation I have ever made. . . .'

'Many thanks, my dear friend. . . .'

'For having performed a fine operation?' said Bérard, with an innocent laugh. 'I owe you thanks for having given me the opportunity of performing it! Good-bye, I am in a hurry; they expect me at the Salpêtrière.'

After taking his departure, Appel passed into the waiting-room, where the final consultations were just finishing, and took down his hat and coat. He gave a few orders, and was on the point of leaving, when the hall-door opened, and Pierre, looking rather pale, and in travelling costume, entered the room. On seeing him, Appel gave an exclamation of joy, and advanced towards the young man with open arms.

'Ah! it is you? You have been home, I suppose? Have you seen your mother? . . .'

A look of embarrassment came over Pierre's face as he replied to this succession of questions.

'No, I have not seen my mother. . . . At home they told me that I should find you here.'

Appel stopped, looked attentively at the young man, and said gravely:

'Then you have not seen your mother? . . . What is the meaning of that? . . . You will explain it all to me, I suppose. . . .'

'That is why I am here,' replied Pierre, in firm though grieved accents.

'Then it is needless to stay here, where we should be continually disturbed. . . . Follow me. . . . We will go outside.'

He took the arm of the child he had brought up and whom he loved as though he were his own son, and he felt it tremble at his touch. Then he pressed him closer to his side, sending into the body of the young man not merely the heat of his blood, but the very outpour of his sympathy. They slowly descended the stairs, and found themselves on the footpath of the Rue d'Assas, with the iron railings of the Luxembourg in front. Without a word, Appel walked by Pierre's side, forming some idea, by the beating of his heart, of the storm that was raging within. And now, like a young horse which knows its master's hand, and proceeds along in a less restive and savage condition, Pierre began to undergo the physical ascendancy of the other. Passing through the gate, they entered the grounds which were deserted at this hour, and began to walk along the alleys. Appel

now looked steadily at his step-son, and in tones of great gentleness said :

'Well ! my dear child, what can be passing in your mind to make you so different from what you were three weeks ago ? What misunderstanding has come between us ? I say "us," for I identify myself with your mother, as I have always done in anything concerning you.'

On hearing this grave voice, vibrating with emotion, and recalling acts of devotion and tenderness, Pierre groaned, tears flowed down his cheeks, he clasped his hands together, and stood there motionless and voiceless in front of his friend and benefactor, his true father. Appel, painfully impressed by the other's anguish and suffering, but perfectly self-possessed and far above all vulgar preoccupations, thought of nothing but one thing, how to afford relief to this tortured soul. Every noble element in his thought became inflamed with the desire to strengthen the tottering will, and to restore to the young man's troubled mind the notion of duty.

'You have done right in coming to me,' he said, his calm, soothing eyes fixed on Pierre. 'I see in this a proof of confidence. You wished to spare your mother the slightest pain. But what mean these tears, my child ? Do you not know that from me you have everything to hope and nothing to fear ? *I* have not changed at all ; you will always find me the one to whom for the past twenty years you have been in the habit of speaking quite freely.'

'Ah ! I shall need to remember that to find courage to approach you. . . .'

'To find courage to approach me ?' interrupted

Appel. 'What is the meaning of this? You make me anxious. Have you any reproach to bring against yourself? And don't you care to confess it to me?'

Pierre blushed, and shook his head mournfully.

'If that were all, I should be far less miserable!'

'Then if it is not you who have done me a wrong, it is I who have done you one,' said Appel gravely. 'For that is the only way in which I can explain your language and interpret your attitude. What have I done? What do you accuse me of, my child?'

Pierre's lips trembled, and his face expressed the most cruel suffering, until finally he cried out in despair:

'You have taken the place of my father, in relation to my mother and myself!'

'Oh! it is that, is it?' said Appel. 'Yes, it was inevitable. Poor, unhappy child!'

'I am not asking you to pity me,' continued Pierre, exasperated by the doctor's gentle calmness, 'but to free yourself from blame!'

'Then you have seen your father?' asked the savant. 'You have spoken to him?'

'Yes, I have not left him once for the past fortnight.'

'And during the same period you seem to have detached yourself from us. Quite logical, after all; the situation in which the hardships of life have placed us all could scarcely give any other solution. Take sides either with your father or with your mother, for it would appear impossible for anyone of intelligence and feeling to share one's self between the two, so to speak. As soon as I heard that you had met your father in Maillane, I was conscious of all the difficulties the situation would present. . . . And I pitied you beforehand, for I know you too well to

have thought that you would accommodate yourself not to decide which of the two is deserving of your respect and love.'

'Decide? Then you, too, think it my duty to decide?' stammered Pierre. 'But what resolution shall I come to? How shall I obtain information?'

'Ask me: I will reply.'

'Will you tell me about my father?'

'No! that is your mother's business; she alone has the right, if she considers it necessary, to tell you whatever you may wish to know. From my mouth you shall not hear a single word capable of remaining in your memory as a cause of complaint against me. Whatever happens, I intend that you shall think that I have sacrificed my own peace of mind for your own, and that my affection for you has been stronger than my interest.'

Before that noble countenance, shining with sincerity, Pierre shuddered. What doubt was possible of Appel's loyalty? And yet, not to doubt was to acknowledge his father to be in the wrong. And he did not wish to acknowledge that his father was in the wrong. . . . His whole being revolted at the thought that this stranger had taken, quite rightfully and without having usurped it, the place of the man whose blood ran in his own veins. He forced himself to anger, stifled the cry of his conscience, and regarded it as a foregone conclusion that Dartigues was innocent. He wished immediately to convict Appel of treason, and feverishly asked:

'Before my father left France, did you know my mother?'

'Yes.'

'Was it for that reason that my father left?'

'I do not think so.'

'Ah! then you are not certain?'

'Can I be certain of what he may have heard or thought?'

'Then he knew you loved my mother?'

'I do not know.'

'You did love her, all the same?'

Appel raised his delicate hand, as was his habit when giving a scientific demonstration, and in firm accents said:

'You expect my reply to entirely clear away all your doubts. Then you shall be satisfied: Before your mother bore my name, I never had for her anything but the most devoted and respectful affection. When she was alone in the world, without help or resource, even without hope, I offered, and she accepted, my protection and love. This is, in brief, the story of our life in common. You must remember the first years of your life, for though a mere child, you were capable of understanding things. Try to recollect the modest home in which you were brought up. Was it the abode of people who live an irregular life of gaiety and pleasure? Work with me, simplicity and virtue with your mother, such was our rule of conduct. Do people live so who take no account of the dignity of existence? After the lessons and examples we have given you, are we forced, in addition, to assure you of the purity of our lives? Ought not the facts to speak for themselves, and carry conviction into your mind? I am sorry, my child, that you are a prey to such doubts. Your judgment as regards your mother ought to have been fixed and

immovable, and I now see that you have had your doubts, and perhaps have them still.'

Pierre bowed his head and murmured :

'I can no longer distinguish what is good from what is bad. Everything about me is dark.'

'Yes, you are unhappy, and I pity you.'

'Then why do you not enlighten me?'

'In what way?'

'By defending yourself, since you are attacked, by formulating precise arguments, producing striking proofs. . . .'

'In a word, by accusing your father?' exclaimed Appel. 'No, I will not do that. If you must learn the truth, it shall not be from my mouth. Nor will your mother, I know, be herself willing to tell you what you are so eager to know. She has already suffered quite sufficiently from these events, and it would be too painful for her to recall them.'

'But my father also has suffered. He, too, has been unhappy! Is it through his own fault, or through that of others? In a word, is he guilty or innocent? Must I flee him as I would a monster, or draw near and console him as a victim?'

'Even though he were a monster, you would have no right to flee him, for he is your father. If you wish my opinion, you ought not to try to judge him, for a son ought to close his eyes over his father's mistakes unless he is bent on repairing them.'

They had stopped close at the edge of the fountain ; the limpid surface was wrinkled by the harmonious movements of the swans, which, in tranquil disdain, glided gracefully along. The gentle air, laden with the fragrance of the closing winter, passed through

the groves, just bursting into green sprouts. Children were sporting in the sand, under the guardianship of indolent nurses seated on the marble slabs. Away in the distance rose the sumptuous palace of Marie de Medicis, its stone front glittering in the sun. A mighty repose brooded over the vast and tranquil garden. And the two men, separated from the busy, active world, were here isolated with their thoughts, able to follow their development without being disturbed. Pierre raised his eyes to Appel's face, and said in a sudden burst of effusion :

'Oh ! my dear friend, pardon all these suspicious fears of mine. . . . You are so superior in intelligence, for you see the combat that is taking place in my mind. Tell me what I can do, what I ought to do. Do not leave me to myself, for then I flounder about in an obscurity which terrifies me. I need your advice, your help. . . .'

Appel smiled.

'Then you have still confidence in me ?'

'How could it be otherwise ? I have never known you to act but for the benefit of others. It is just that which causes my torture. . . . You are too just, too great, too good ! . . . Your superiority crushes me. . . . I accuse you, and yet you only answer by words of moderation and pity !'

'Perhaps I am a hypocrite ?' asked Appel gently.

'Then, for the last twenty years you have had the hypocrisy to guide, protect, and love me. . . . Ah ! this hypocrisy has been so fruitful in benefits that I do not know if ever I shall be able to pay the debt I owe you. . . .'

'Who asks you to pay any debt ? Do you wish to

liberate yourself from what I have been so happy to do for you?'

'No; I prefer to remain always your debtor. . . . But, I want you to have pity on my distress. . . . Throw some light on the situation. Do not leave me alone in front of this problem to which I can find no solution.'

Bursting into sobs, he leaned tremblingly on his companion's shoulder and wept bitterly.

'Come!' said Appel tenderly. 'When you came here an hour ago, you were nervous and irritated, but your nerves will soon regain their calm, and this irritation will pass away with your tears. You are only a child; you think it possible to solve the most important questions of life in ten minutes. We must take time to reflect. Above all, you must go and report yourself to your mother.'

Crossing the garden, they reached the Rue du Luxembourg. On entering the quiet house in which he had spent such a happy life, Pierre felt his heart fill with a delightful sense of pleasure. All the bitterness he had suffered from melted away in a feeling of peaceful calm, and the familiar surroundings regained possession of him with irresistible force. He mounted the stairs with eager steps, as though in a hurry to enter the room, though he had hesitated so long in coming at all. It was with joy he heard the greeting of the man-servant, who welcomed him heartily, and, without permitting his mother to be informed of his arrival, he impatiently opened the door of the salon where she generally spent most of her time.

Mme. Appel was seated near the window, reading. Raising her head, she let the book drop from her

hands on to the carpet, and blushing with pleasure, held out her arms, into which, without a word of explanation, Pierre flung himself, bestowing on her a shower of kisses intended to efface all the sorrow and anxiety she must have felt on his behalf. Appel, standing at the door, was watching this scene with a smile on his lips. He had hoped to give Francine the joy of restoring to her Pierre affectionate and repentant. He knew the value of human resolutions, and that the strongest will give way before a deep emotion. But he also knew that reason always regains its rights, and that a mere outburst of feeling does not solve a moral question so grave as this one was. Accordingly, he enjoyed the present peace and calm, but resolutely awaited the difficulties to come.

'So you have returned?' said the mother, pushing back her son's forehead to look into his eyes. 'I don't find you looking very well.'

'He is tired after his long journey,' said Appel. 'To-morrow he will look as usual. . . . Suppose we lunch at once. It is already noon, and I must be at the Faculté at one o'clock.'

All three, as was their wont, took their seats at table, and not a word was exchanged on the matter they were all thinking of. By common consent, a truce seemed to have been established, for they felt an immense pleasure at being once more united. Francine questioned her son as to the country, the climate, and the different places of interest around Maillane. She spoke of things, not of persons, and seemed to have made up her mind not to force, but rather to await, her son's confidence.

Pierre, so long as the gay, light conversation lasted,

concealed his desire of receiving information, but kept watch with attentive eye the whole time. He could not free himself from the charm emanating from that peaceful, serene home-life. The very atmosphere was one of loyalty and frankness. The respect of the servants for their masters was a test of the indisputable esteem in which they were held. The difference between the customs prevalent here and those at Maillane sprang vividly before his mind. The freedom of language used by Barandet and Rémançon, even in the presence of Bella, had often astonished and displeased him. The servants, too, though respectful in the antechamber and the salon, were often insolent and noisy in the Maillane servants' hall and kitchen. Here a delicate and noble dignity were universal, whilst at Maillane there was nothing but loud and vulgar ostentation. But, after all, was this the fault of the newcomers? Could they improvise what others did by tradition?

He felt disposed to excus ethem, and yet he could not deny the contrasts between the two conditions, and that one of them was far superior to the other. Between the delicate, aristocratic Appel, and the exuberant, jovial Dartigues there was an essential difference. The one was of a profound nature, the other all on the surface. Pierre could not ignore the fact that his father was far more seductive and captivating than the Professor. It must be almost impossible to escape from his influence, once it pleased him to exert it. But Appel, though slower in imposing his prestige and winning the hearts of others, always accomplished his object in a definite and lasting fashion.

Pierre was conscious of this just now, as the gentle, deliberate words of his educator aroused in his mind

echoes to which vibrated all the impressions he had ever received. With his lofty intelligence and poetic instinct, the young man clearly understood that all the satisfaction he had experienced in the presence of his father at Maillane was rather gross and vulgar, whilst that he enjoyed in the company of his mother and Appel, amid scenes in which his whole childhood had been passed, was of an ideal purity and grace.

On the other hand, the great physiologist, clairvoyant for himself as well as for others, assumed an expression of smiling peace, and, as he watched Pierre, saw, with profound joy, all the sentiments the young man had experienced reflected on his brow. Whilst the mother, in her joy at seeing her son again, thought of nothing but her present happiness, Appel calculated the chances of the coming struggle in the moral impressions of his pupil, and was beginning to hope for a victory all the more precious from the intensity of the fight. When the dessert was on the table, the Professor rose and said :

' I must leave you now ; there are some notes I have to arrange in my study. Finish at your ease. . . . We shall meet again this evening. I should advise you to call and see Des Barres, Pierre. He will be very pleased to see you again.'

Not a single allusion to the election. The mere recommendation of a duty, an act of politeness to be undertaken towards the friend and master. But how big with results was that simple phrase ! Pierre, at a blow, was flung back into the midst of the tempest ; nor could he avoid it. The man-servant had placed the coffee on the table ; Appel had left the room, and mother and son were now alone.

'There are decrees of destiny from which no escape is possible,' said Francine, after a moment's silence. 'Who would have thought that this journey to Maillane, which you entered upon with such careless gaiety, would bring about such results? Poor child! And yet, it is not your fault. It is very unjust that you should have to suffer from the consequences.'

'My dear mother, justice is an exception in the combination of events. Scarcely anything happens except by chance. But when one is in the presence of facts, and is capable of exercising his judgment, that is the time one must force one's self to be just. For decisions taken carry with them a terrible responsibility. It would be frightful to sacrifice the innocent.'

'For a child who finds himself placed between his father and mother, my dear one,' said Francine simply, 'neither of the two can be guilty. How could one decide between them?'

'And yet, suppose a choice were to be made?'

'Yes, Pierre, it is there the law of life appears in all its harshness. Why cannot we foresee that, at some time or other, the debt of our folly or weakness will have to be paid? One never thinks that, in committing a fault or crime, one becomes a creditor to misfortune. Nothing is ever lost; everything is paid for, good as well as evil. There is no instance known of an evil action not having been punished, either publicly or by some hidden suffering. Happy are those who pay their own debts without having the pain of seeing their own misdeeds atoned for by their children!'

'Mother,' said Pierre, 'will you have sufficient courage to reveal to me what I have hitherto tried in vain to discover? Will you inform me whom I ought

to consider responsible for this division between my father and mother?'

'What advantage would you gain? What relief would the knowledge of the truth bring you? The present situation, however much you may deplore it, cannot be changed. Divorce has broken what marriage had united. Your father has gone away on his side, and your mother on hers. Nothing can ever unite them again. Why are you so anxious to discover a solution to a problem which has none? You have loved me ever since you opened your eyes to the light of day. You have loved Appel ever since you have been able to understand the meaning of kindness. And now you have discovered your father. Who forbids your loving him, if he has succeeded in inspiring affection in your heart?'

'A moment ago, mother, you said there were creditors to misfortune. I am one. But who has contracted the debt I am paying?'

'The future will tell you.'

'You indicate that I shall learn through my father!'

'I am not accusing him.'

'Are you granting him supreme indulgence?'

'No, my child, utter forgetfulness. Life has given me my revenge. Destiny, in placing Frédéric Appel in my path, has been full of pity and tenderness for me, in spite of all the troubles I have passed through. So that I have no right to be influenced by other feelings than those of love and gentleness for others, on account of the favours with which I myself have been laden. Accordingly, do not question me concerning those of whom I do not wish to speak. But you may speak of me if you like; there I have nothing to fear.

For I have loved you well; nothing has ever usurped your place in my heart. Had I had the necessary ability and means to bring you up, to instruct you, and make of you the man you are, perhaps I should have had sufficient strength to refuse the happiness I was offered, to devote myself to you alone. But I was certain that Appel would be a wise and benevolent guide and instructor for you, and—allow me to say it—the moral father he has shown himself. It has been a double joy to me to see his affection fall in accord with mine in realizing all I had hoped you would one day become. You have lived with us, been educated under our care, and you know us, for we have never practised dissimulation before you. Appel has devoted himself to study, and has reached the front rank of contemporary science; I have kept his house, and borne as well as I could his illustrious name. . . . There is the whole story, my child; now you may give your verdict. For twenty years, the only grief I have had has been to feel that there was a doubt in your mind, and to see tears in your eyes on my account.'

Pierre made no reply. He sank on the floor, by his mother's side, and, without raising his eyes, but bending as though in adoration before a saint, he kissed those dear hands that had worked so hard to feed him, and which had gently caressed him, when a slight, suffering babe, in his cradle. He thought of his childhood days, and a feeling of warmth enveloped him as though he felt himself once more wrapped in his mother's arms. And she, feeling that he was won over to her, sure of her power, made no attempt to break the charm, but allowed the time to glide along, happy at seeing by her side once more the son she was afraid of

finding hostile and in revolt against her. Finally she said:

'You have told me nothing of that young girl you have met at Maillane, and to whom you seem so greatly attached. . . .'

Pierre blushed, and, raising his head, asked in tones of embarrassment:

'Who has told you of her?'

'Oh, we know everything, you see. There are people always ready to inform and denounce. . . .'

'Well, it is quite true, mother; I have found in Maillane a charming young girl, so gentle and graceful. . . . And I love her. . . .'

'Ah, my darling! that is a big word, and one full of joy or of pain! A shudder runs through my whole frame as I hear you utter it!'

'Why, if the one to whom it is addressed is deserving of love?'

'Has she, then, taken possession of your heart so suddenly?'

'Oh no, she is anything but a coquette; quite simple and natural, in fact, in spite of having been brought up in luxurious surroundings. We were both living in the full liberty of the open country. In our walks, we chatted together, and spent almost the whole day long in one another's company. . . . I quickly saw that I was not displeasing to her, that it was a pleasure to her to be in my company. . . . I made so bold as to tell her my feelings, and she was frank enough to reply, and so, now, we are engaged to one another.'

'Engaged?'

'So far as ourselves are concerned. For she has her mother, as I have you. And I do not think she would

be any more disposed to disobey her than I am ready to oppose you. . . . Like me, she expects her happiness in her mother's goodness of heart.'

'And this mother is your father's second wife ?'

'Yes, mother; that, I know only too well, is the great difficulty. . . . Can it be solved ? And how ?'

'It is always possible to come to some arrangement, when one has to deal with honest people. But this young girl's mother is so rich ! Would she care for a son-in-law like yourself, with nothing at all ? And what kind of a position will yours be, if you are obliged to live dependent on your wife ?'

'But suppose my father is willing to portion me, that will equalize the situation. . . . He has been very generous to me, and I feel he is disposed to do a great deal.'

A vivid blush rose to Francine's cheeks; she was on the point of crying out to Pierre: 'You must accept nothing from him !' Fortunately she found sufficient strength to say nothing. And yet this was one of the most painful moments she had ever passed through. With a single glance she penetrated to the depths of Pierre's soul, and saw that his father had already attempted to corrupt it. Dartigues well knew how to gain possession of the will and paralyze the resistance of others. He had applied this dreaded method of his to the child he had found again, and, with the aid of natural affection, had crushed down his native pride to the point of having the alms of his liberality accepted, perhaps even desired. But was there no excuse for Pierre ? He was ignorant of the terrible past of his father; all he knew of him was his honeyed eloquence and easy generosity. The mother had no wish to

prolong this conversation on so dangerous a subject. A single word spoken thoughtlessly might compromise her fragile security, and abruptly throw Pierre back in the direction towards which he was already too far inclined. She was a prudent woman, and so forced a smile to her lips, though her heart was torn with anguish.

'Let time bring things about,' she said. 'After due reflection, we may possibly come to some arrangement. There is no necessity to precipitate matters. The main thing is that you are here at home once more. We will say nothing further on the matter to-day.'

This was a considerable relief for Pierre. He felt as though walking on quicksand, and that every step he took might swallow him up; accordingly, he felt grateful to his mother for bringing the situation to a close. Rising from his seat, with an air of cheerfulness, he said:

'Very well! If you will allow me, I will call on Des Barres. At four o'clock I shall find him at the office. . . . I have several explanations to give him. . . .'

'Yes, go at once, my child.'

He once more kissed his mother, and, taking up his hat, left the room.

The offices of the *Revanche du Peuple* are situated in the Rue Montmartre, at the corner of the Rue du Croissant. About four o'clock, at the junction of the two streets, there is a swelling crowd of howling newspaper-vendors, running off in all directions, with piles of printed leaves under their arms, shouting out in hoarse tones the sensation of the day, intended to force the curiosity of the passers-by, and extract from their pockets the reluctant halfpenny. Vehicles, on which are printed in mighty letters the daily circulation of the journal, await the moment to start for the railway-

station. For are not the provinces too waiting eagerly for news ? And there, running faster than all the rest, with feverish haste, as though he had at his disposal the strength of the very horses whose victories he is spreading abroad, may be seen the thin, poverty-stricken individual, howling out at the top of his voice, 'Complete list of winners !' whilst he makes his way along like a madman, jostling the crowd, soon lost to sight in the distance, though his prophetic 'List . . . winners !' may still be heard.

Through the midst of this swarming, jesting and swearing mass of humanity, waving in the air their squares of white paper, Pierre glided until he reached the door of the staircase leading to the offices of the *Revanche du Peuple*. In the courtyard, at the end of which was the entrance to the collective printing establishment of the different journals installed on each floor, was a mingled crowd consisting of typographers, with their long, ink-stained aprons, and reporters, bringing in their final copy. Above all the varied sounds could be heard the dull roar of the rotative machines as they devoured mile upon mile of paper.

Pierre mounted two flights of steps, and found himself in front of a door on which was written in letters a foot high: '*La Revanche du Peuple*. Editor's Office.' Turning the handle, he entered a narrow antechamber, in which, seated in front of a table filled with journals, an attendant was attaching hooks to long lines of horsehair.

'Ah, Saboureau !' said Pierre, 'getting ready for your fishing ?'

'Yes, M. Appel. . . . The season will soon be here now. . . . You wish to see M. Des Barres ? I will tell him you are here. . . .'

'Don't disturb yourself. . . . If he is alone, I will pass in. . . .'

'He is alone.'

Pierre crossed the vestibule, knocked at a door, and, on hearing a strong voice exclaim '*Entrez !*' he walked in.

'Holà ! The child back again !' said Des Barres, rising to his feet. 'How long have you been in Paris ?'

'I arrived this morning. . . .'

'And you have seen your father and mother ?'

'I have just left them.'

'Very good.'

The almost threatening look which had been in Des Barres' eyes during these few introductory words immediately changed.

'Your mother was pleased to see you, was she not ? You know, my boy, you would have to search long before you would find another like her. You would indeed be a villain if you weren't the paragon of sons.'

Des Barres' voice was loud and harsh, almost threatening, as his glance had been.

'I know,' replied Pierre. 'I may not be the best of sons, but at any rate I am the most grateful.'

'Good !' repeated Des Barres in a softer accent. 'So you have just come from Maillane. How are things going down there ? It appears we have a powerful opponent to deal with !'

'You are not ignorant as to . . .' began Pierre, in embarrassment.

'I am ignorant of nothing !' interrupted the journalist. 'I am well acquainted with the difficulties of your position. But who could have foreseen that Dartigues would have disguised himself under the name of Maillane, and that the candidate you were about to

attack was the only one you had no right to resist? Chance is master of us all, my child. Here is the proof of it, once more. And so your father has won you over to his side, has he?'

This familiar tone was so different from the grave caution displayed by Appel, and from the almost dumb terror of his mother, that Pierre was quite nonplussed. In Des Barres' sarcastic accents he seemed to discern a kind of disdain for Dartigues. Looking up at his master, he had the intuition that Des Barres, with the sincerity habitual to his nature, would reveal to him all it was to his interest to know, all he had asked the others in vain to tell him. In bold accents he replied:

'Chance, as you say so truly, has arranged matters very badly. I found myself in the presence of my father . . .'

'Who drew you away beneath the very eyes of our good friend Bréloquier, who could not get over his stupefaction. . . . Ah! M. Dartigues is a very clever man. Very flattering for a son, is it not? Rather better to have a father from America than a mere uncle! For us who knew him formerly, sunk in misery and poverty, his accession to the rank of a millionaire is a very interesting picture. But, then, such things have no impression on me. It appears that you have been dazzled by it all.'

'Who has supplied you with such information?' asked Pierre bitterly.

'Oh, public rumour! I hear that my election is compromised, that M. de Maillane has won over the whole countryside by his generosity, that the strongest upholders of my cause have failed me, and that Providence . . . in the South of France, they say

Providence . . . has already paid the benefactor of the district by restoring to his bosom a son who had been stolen from him twenty years ago. There, my child, that is what they have been publishing in their journals ever since you left the banks of the Arbosque: you have been stolen, kept away for twenty years from the tender caresses of your loving father. And stolen by whom? Naturally, by your mother, with the collusion of that terrible rascal, Professor Appel! And this is the way, in the year of grace 1900, on the threshold of the twentieth century, with all the means of exact information supplied us by telegraphy, with or without wire, the telephone, the phonograph, etc., etc., that the history, not merely of peoples, but of families, is written!'

Pierre gave his master a beseeching look.

'Will you tell me the whole truth?'

'I have never concealed it from anyone.'

'May I question you?'

'Certainly.'

'What do you know regarding my father?'

Des Barres looked Pierre all over, and, before replying, said:

'Are you a man, capable of understanding and judging, or a mere child, anxious and uneasy? Is not this experiment you are making too strong for your conscience? A month ago, I would have answered for you, but since then you have given signs of moral indecision. You know my principles: the individual is nothing, the mass everything! To bend one's mind and force one's heart to obey pretended natural laws is a whimpering dogmatism I have nothing to do with. After I have told you what I think of Dartigues, if your

only argument consists in replying, " He is my father," I will say nothing further, but, from that moment, we shall cease to be in intellectual accord with one another. Is that understood ?'

' You make me tremble all over !' stammered Pierre. ' What are you about to tell me ? Is my father absolutely devoid of merit ?'

' Your father is a man from whom you ought to keep at a distance, my child, for you have nothing good to expect from him. You know how I love you. Well, the only advice I have to give you is this : Do not give way to Dartigues' seduction. Under his influence, you would lose your pride and manliness of character—in a word, whatever of moral vigour we have developed in you—to become nothing but an unprincipled villain, like all by whom he is surrounded. . . .'

' Are you sure of what you are saying ?'

' Do you consider me capable of lightly causing you pain ?'

' But what has he done to make you so severe against him ?' exclaimed Pierre in accents of despair.

' Ask rather what he has not done. . . . But it would be all the same, I should not tell you. I cannot refuse to open your eyes, since you absolutely insist. . . . But I will not undertake to poison your thoughts with stories about Monsieur Dartigues. The best thing you can do is to let him go along his way, without accompanying him. You no longer bear his name. Appel, as delicate as he is foreseeing, took care to give you his from your earliest infancy, suspecting that a day might come when this name would be for you a supreme protection. You are free by your father's will, for he abandoned you when you needed him, and you are under no obligation to return to him when he

needs you. If he were poor, I would say to you: "Forget everything, and help him." But he is rich: it is that fact which saves you from the charge of ingratitude. His fortune counterbalances your independence. Only the moral aspect of the case need be considered, and there no hesitation need be made. Divorce has broken every bond between your father and mother. The law has given you to your mother. You have the right to say to M. Dartigues: "I do not know you!"'

'Too late!' exclaimed Pierre. 'I have seen him, and we have wept in one another's arms! I can neither disown my kisses nor efface my tears! After acknowledging him as my father, how can I now repel him?'

Des Barres walked with nervous strides to and fro in the study. His head was bent, and a look of concern overshadowed his face. Finally he said:

'This is the result of education. . . . Children are taught to bend to sentimental subordination, to incline before systematic deference. . . . Are there no men who can think and act for themselves? He has kissed his father, and they have shed tears together! Arguments a nurse-girl might use! From a moral point of view, the whole social system is to be built afresh! We are being ruined from excess of affected sentimentalism! To think that three-quarters of the population of the globe form decisions according to similar reasonings! A yoke of iron ought to be put on a society in such a state of dissolution! . . . The world is giving way beneath it!'

Striking violently on his desk, he continued:

'But I don't intend to allow M. Dartigues to enter the Chambre! There are already a quite sufficient number of rascals at the Palais-Bourbon, without his adding to them. . . . I am well armed, I can tell you.

The sly rogue doubtless considered it a master-stroke to use you as a buckler. No bad reasoning either. All the same, his plan will come to naught. I am going to kill two birds with one stone. In demolishing his candidature, I will open your eyes regarding him. He has tried to deceive me, but I will teach him to know me better!'

'But will you not admit that he may have been quite sincere so far as I am concerned?'

'No! he is merely acting! He says to himself: "Old Des Barres is the friend of Appel and of Francine; it is he who has brought up the child. . . . He will not be willing to hurt him! For their sake, he will spare me, and I will take advantage of his weakness!"'

'But is he not capable of loving me?'

'On a sudden? Just at the moment it is convenient and advantageous for him to do so?'

'But I loved him at first sight. . . . May it not have been the same with him?'

'Come, now, Pierre! Try to be a little more serious!'

'But what conditions do you intend to impose on him?'

'He must return to America, and not come to trouble us here in Europe. . . . He has already made inroads into Africa, with what he is pleased to call "business." A terrible file of accusations against him was brought to me yesterday. . . . But as it was for sale, I packed off both the file and its holder in double quick speed. . . .'

'Who was the wretch who offered you such a bargain?'

'A former functionary, who had fallen into journalistic blackmail, and whom Dartigues had refused to pay, I suppose. . . . He was wrong not to do so, for the rascal has a venomous tongue. What he

offered me for money he is capable of publishing for nothing in the journal to which he contributes. . . . A regular hyena, this Galbran ! . . .'

'Galbran ? What ! that bandit ? . . .'

'Ah, I see you know him ! Luckily for yourself, you have no money. The file is still on sale !'

A wave of colour mounted to Pierre's face. His hand mechanically pressed the cheque-book his father had given him. If Des Barres could have foreseen that his pupil had at his disposal so large a credit, would he have spoken with such ironical sincerity ? Was it not Pierre's first duty to suppress this file which might be used to ruin Dartigues, to do him this service without his having the slightest suspicion of the fact ? The idea had already entered his mind. Nothing was easier than to find Galbran. He passed his evenings in the artistic cafés of Montmartre, and, from nine to ten, was to be seen regularly at the Renaissance des Lettres. The editor's secretary cut short Pierre's reflections as he entered Des Barres' study.

'Well ! my child, tell Appel I will call on him after dinner, and take care of yourself. There is no hurry ; you have plenty of time to think of what you intend to do. The essential point is not to precipitate matters. Remember that time arranges everything. If it were not so, how could we endure to live at all ?'

He shook the young man's hand, accompanied him to the antechamber, and, just as Pierre was going, said once more :

'Be more kind and amiable than ever with your mother. She is very uneasy, and you must try to reassure her. You know, she has suffered greatly in the past, and it is only right that she should be happy now.'

CHAPTER IX

THE large common-room of the Brasserie de la Renaissance des Lettres was beginning to fill. It was eleven o'clock, and artists, dressed in black, with long dishevelled hair, journalists eager for scraps of information, men of the world, attracted by a taste for new impressions, were all assembled in common idleness or ennui. At the end of the room was a raised platform, on which a piano, roughly pounded upon by an accompanist, gave forth vague, uncertain sounds, whilst a squint-eyed, loud-mouthed poet chanted forth a gloomy song. He could scarcely be heard by reason of the clatter of the waiters as they served the drinks, or even seen through the blue tint of tobacco-smoke with which the atmosphere was laden. In a corner, forming a side-room, separated from the large one by means of draperied pillars, before a table laden with cocktails, sat Rémançon, the pretty Amandine de Tresmes, and a small weasel-faced man, of insolent and low mien, but clothed with extreme elegance.

'Well, my dear Galbran,' said Rémançon, 'Amandine has explained to you what it is all about? It would be foolish indeed of you to go against your own interests. . . . Dartigues is very favourably disposed towards you. . . . The moment is propitious. . . . Seize it. . . . It will be long before you

find another so good. . . . I myself have arranged terms of peace with the master. . . . Do not make me retract! . . .'

The small man smiled, raised his glass to his lips, and said, with a shake of the head :

'I know Dartigues. . . . He has treated me with pitiless harshness. And, after all, what had I done to deserve it?'

'Ah! you ask such a question?' exclaimed Amandine gaily. 'You simply stole the cash-box of the State, nothing more! As though you could not be satisfied with all the presents and bribes the contractors of the Gabès Railway paid you!'

'That is false!' said Galbran indignantly.

'False?' continued Amandine. 'Don't tell me that, for I know well where the money went. And Rémançon, too, who caught you in the very act! Come, play fairly! What if you have lost? You needn't try to deceive us, for we know you well. Don't try to pass as a model of virtue; let it suffice if you are looked upon as intelligent!'

Rémançon burst out laughing.

'Come, Galbran, just give heed to our charming friend. Her advice is good. . . . You have a Dartigues file to sell, as we are aware. . . . I will buy it from you; hand it over to me. . . .'

'It is no longer on sale,' said the former functionary coldly.

'No longer on sale!' repeated Rémançon. 'Have you sold it already?'

'No, I have given it,' said Galbran, with a gesture of indifference.

'No nonsense, now!' said Amandine. 'You have

given documents which, you know well, are worth a great deal! Either you have lost your head or you are playing us a fine game! Come, now, fix your price at once; we will pay you whatever you like.'

'The file is no longer in my possession,' declared Galbran.

'What have you done with it?'

'I have given it, I tell you.'

'To whom?'

'To one who will know how to use it in such a way as will make Dartigues dance,' growled Galbran, with an evil smile.

'Well! indeed, you are a poisonous creature!' exclaimed Amandine. 'I arrange a splendid affair with Rémançon here, who knows the price of a conscience, after having bought so many, and you prefer to injure your enemy rather than benefit yourself? . . .'

'I hate Dartigues! For me, he is the type of a successful and insolent parvenu. But just wait a little! He will receive my lead in his wing, and, once he feels the touch, I intend he shall know who has struck him! He sacrificed me to the bawlings of the inhabitants of Tunis, threw me overboard because he looked upon me as no longer of any service to him. He shall know that he has been mistaken!'

'You say he sacrificed you. . . . Could he have saved you?'

'Yes. He had only to give me the fifty thousand francs I owed. . . . He would not do it. He handed me over to the finance inspector, who had come to check the cash. . . . His own blackguardly conduct ought to have made him more indulgent. . . . Claude Brun spoke in my favour. . . . He was the only one.

But Dartigues would do nothing. He wrapped himself round in his mantle of brand-new honesty, and gave himself an air of alarmed modesty. . . . Embezzlements? He could not believe his ears! Go and beg on behalf of the one who had committed them? . . . It was a mere momentary loan from a safe of which I alone had the key. . . . I would have paid it back in time. . . . And he would not permit me to do so! He handed me over to his enemies as a guarantee of his own honesty. Dartigues' honesty! Those who glance over the file will find proofs of it! Ah! ah! if only a quarter of what I have revealed is published, Dartigues will have a hot time, and I shall be amply revenged!'

Galbran manifested his rage by so horrible a grimace that Rémançon and Amandine, accustomed as they were to witness the utmost depths of depravity, sat there terrified and ashamed before such a venomous explosion of hatred.

'Well! you have done as you chose,' said Amandine, 'but I cannot say that I admire you. I do not call it clever to lose one's eyes in knocking out both your neighbour's. I should have thought that, with the money you would have received, you might have spruced yourself up a little and obtained a certain amount of pleasure in life.'

'I am in need of nothing, and am quite able to offer myself a moral satisfaction.'

'What a luxury!'

'Just so!'

'After all, you may as well tell us everything now. To whom have you given the file?'

'Ah! I have no fear that he will sell it again at a

profit. It is Dartigues' opponent who is now in possession of it.'

'Des Barres?' exclaimed Rémançon in astonishment. 'The man of Plutarch, the incorruptible Des Barres make use of such means? Impossible!'

'So far possible that he sent his pupil, his right arm, young Appel, for the file. . . .'

'Pierre Appel?'

'Yes, Pierre Appel, Professor Appel's son; there are not two Pierre Appels. . . .'

Amandine burst out laughing so loudly that Rémançon, won over by her hilarity, could not keep his countenance, but joined her. Galbran, in stupefied amazement, watched them with hostile mien, with a presentiment of some vexatious mistake or other.

'Well, my friend,' said Amandine, after regaining her *sang-froid*, 'I cannot compliment you on the arrangement of your plans—nor even on your luck in putting them into execution! So you have given your file to Pierre Appel? Bravo! Then we have no further need to stay here. Our business is settled.'

'I don't understand you,' said Galbran arrogantly.

'I don't think you do! Do you know the real name of the one who generally calls himself Pierre Appel?'

Galbran turned green. He began to see there must have been some huge mystification, and guessed that he was the victim.

'Well, I will tell you. His name is Pierre Dartigues. In a word, he is the son of the great Dartigues. There is no need for me to give you too many explanations as to where your file is at this very moment!'

'If this young villain has been sporting with me . . .' growled Galbran.

'You need not have the slightest doubt of it, my simple young man! How old are you, Galbran?'

The ex-functionary emptied his glass. He became thoughtful, and said in measured accents:

'We shall see how it will finish.'

'Have you a second file, my dear friend?'

'Or photographs of the contents of the first?' insinuated Rémançon, who was well acquainted with such proceedings.

'After all,' said Galbran proudly, 'don't go away with the idea that I have been swindled: I have been well paid!'

'Of course. I was just saying to myself: "Can the rascal have given it for nothing?"'

'I have received ten thousand francs.'

'Indeed! Now, just think of that! Rémançon, we must acknowledge that our friend is not so stupid as we had imagined.'

'After all, my dear Galbran,' said Rémançon seriously, 'do not spoil your position by vulgar, underhanded attempts. You have handed over your file to Dartigues. I can allow him to give you credit for that, without telling him that it was not of your own free will that the transaction turned out to his advantage. . . . Do not spoil the game now by taking up a hostile position. No pin-pricks; an absolute and complete neutrality. . . . On these conditions, I will promise you another ten thousand francs the day our friend is elected.'

'He will not be elected! He is too greatly compromised!'

'He will be, I tell you, and he will procure you a splendid recompense in the new administration.'

'No, I intend to remain free. I am tired of playing my part in the governmental orchestra. But I have not forgotten the music, that they will quickly discover!'

'How vulgar you are becoming, Galbran! To think that I had always admired you for your wit! . . . For certainly it was not for your beauty, that I will swear to! And only to-day I discover that you are a mere simpleton. What a sorry evening we have spent! Come along, Rémançon!'

'Very good! So there is no harm done, Galbran, after all! And when you have returned to your right mind, remember, neither door nor cash-box will be closed against you.'

Galbran shook his head, with a gesture of hatred, and the other two left the café.

Negotiations between Pierre and Galbran had been commenced that very morning in the offices of the *Oriflamme*, where the ex-functionary was engaged in drawing up parliamentary echoes, with a knowledge of the governmental staff, and such information concerning ministerial intrigues as made him a precious collaborator. Pierre had arrived just as the cashier was refusing the journalist a sum in advance, on the pretext that he had already spent two months' salary. Galbran knew Pierre from having met him at the theatre on the occasion of first performances. Appel and Des Barres were sufficiently famous to attract attention to this young man, well known by his brilliant reports and the publication of a volume of insipid but neatly-turned poems.

'As you see, my dear fellow, the reservoir is empty, or the tap will not turn. You are very fortunate to have nothing to do but just live on. . . .'

'If you are in need of money for the moment, I shall perhaps be able to do something for you. . . .'

'Ah! ah!' exclaimed Galbran. 'Has Des Barres, by chance, sent you?'

'Certainly,' said Pierre, with a blush at the lie he was telling.

'Come along into my study; there we shall be more at ease, and free from possible disturbance. . . .'

They entered a small cell, three yards square, the only furniture of which consisted of a table and two chairs. On the table a blotting-pad covered with scattered leaves, an erasing-knife, a long pair of scissors for cutting newspaper paragraphs, and cork-screw penholders. The central panel was occupied by a chest of drawers. Galbran carefully closed the door, and, offering one of the two chairs to his visitor, said:

'So you have applied to me?'

'Yes.'

'Concerning the file?'

'Naturally.'

'So Des Barres has changed his mind, has he? And a very good thing, too. His election will be assured with the help of the documents I am in a position to supply him with. To tell the truth, that villain of a Dartigues is only receiving what he deserves!'

Bursting into a laugh, he did not see that a quiver of pain had passed through the young man's frame. Rubbing his hands together, he said:

'Dartigues' friends would only be too glad if they could lay hands on this file. Rémançon and Claude Brun have done their best to obtain possession of it, but only he shall have it who will avenge me on Dartigues. Des Barres can do this. Besides, my dear

fellow, would it not be a real pity if a hero like Des Barres were beaten by such a vile individual as this M. de Maillane? The finest speaker in the Socialist ranks! And, then, what an organizer! The only man capable of counterbalancing the influence of those stupid, uncompromising collectivists. . . . . I am really pleased you have come, for I was quite sorry he refused my offer!'

'You still want ten thousand francs?' asked Pierre abruptly.

The other, astonished at Pierre's tone, raised his head, and cast a critical glance at his interlocutor.

'It is not too much, I assure you!' he continued. 'This file has given me some pains to draw up, and I must pay my expenses. . . .'

'I have no intention to bargain with you; I am quite ready to pay. . . . Ten thousand, you say?'

'Yes, ten thousand.'

Pierre slowly unbuttoned his coat, took from his pocket the cheque-book, and taking up a pen from the table, wrote down the sum.

'Make it payable to bearer,' said Galbran eagerly. 'No name; that is unnecessary. You might also, please, tear off the counterfoil, and give it to me.'

'What precautions you are taking!'

'My dear friend, one learns by experience. The counterfoils of cheques are often very important. . . . I don't say that for you, who belong to the very cream of respectability. But, then, one never knows! Papers so often change hands.'

'Very well; it shall be as you wish! . . .'

Tearing off the cheque and the counterfoil, he placed them on the table, looked steadily at Galbran, and said:

'Where is the file?'

'In this cupboard.'

Rising from his seat, he unlocked the cupboard, the interior of which appeared to be crammed full of books and old papers. On the panel hung a dirty threadbare jacket, which the journalist used to save his new frock-coat.

'Here it is!' he said, taking up a bundle of papers carefully tied up and sealed. 'Would you like to examine it?'

'No; here is the money.'

Pierre rose to his feet, as though anxious to quit this room in which had just been consummated the bargain which placed him in possession of his father's secrets.

'You are going so soon?' asked Galbran, who seemed as though he wished to complete his file by a few verbal explanations. 'I could tell you of the origin of all these details. . . .'

'No! that is no affair of mine. . . . I simply buy the file, and carry it off. That is all.'

'Quite right! Des Barres will understand it. Besides, tell him I am at his disposal, in case he wishes enlightenment on any particular point. . . .'

'Certainly! Good-bye.'

'What a hurry you are in! Come for a drink.'

'Some other time.'

'As you please,' said Galbran, vexed at Pierre's inexplicable opposition to his attempts at politeness.

He conducted him to the stairs, and then, with eager steps and shining eyes, as might be expected in one whose pocket contained an unexpected sum of money, he went straight to the cash office, and addressing the cashier, said ironically:

'Well, you old skin-flint, you may keep your precious money. I don't want any of it.'

'You have just come into an heritage?'

'Yes, dropped from the moon!'

Thereupon he returned to the editor's room, where several of his colleagues were attentively watching two of their number engage in a game of piquet.

Pierre, with the precious file under his arm, walked off hastily in the direction of the Rue du Luxembourg. No, indeed, it was not to hand it over to Des Barres that he was carrying off this file, after buying it from the perfidious Galbran. Perhaps it was to examine it himself, and discover the secret it was so greatly to his interest to know. He continued his route, without paying the slightest attention to the rain beginning to fall or to the passers-by, who elbowed him on every side. He was anxious to return home, to be alone, and learn the nature of the charges capable of being brought against his father.

He arrived at his rooms wet through and splashed all over with mud. He paid no attention to the remarks of his maid-servant, who carried off his coat and hat to dry them, but shut himself at once in his room. There he was alone and free; no one could reason with him, prevent him from satisfying his conscience, so tortured by doubt. Sitting down, he placed the file on his table, and prepared to open it. His hand hesitated, he felt his heart palpitate; he seemed to be on the point of committing a sacrilege in penetrating the mystery of his father's life. In the silence of the room, within a few steps from his mother, he remembered that neither she nor Appel had been willing even to blame, much less condemn, Dartigues.

Though so interested in defending themselves, when he, whose tenderness and respect must be so precious to them, seemed to suspect them, they had preferred to keep silence. They refused to accuse the absent one, even though such a course meant the establishing of their own innocence. And he, Dartigues' son, merely impelled by morbid curiosity, was preparing to unearth this past, now dead and gone, just as a malefactor violates a tomb. And yet the truth was perhaps there, the indisputable, dazzling truth. Was he voluntarily to thrust it aside, to close his eyes, when a single instant would suffice to put an end to his doubts?

He made an effort to strengthen his tottering will by means of arguments of utilitarian morality. Ought he not, above all, to decide for the general interest in the right sense of the word? What? Should he deliberately remain in ignorance? If he did so, what advantage would it be to those very individuals he wished so ardently to respect? Should he leave them all to be suspected alike? Was such a course just or practical? The scruples with which he was now beset were merely a sign of weakness. He ought to prove that he was the master of the situation, and, without further hesitation, scatter the darkness through which he was struggling to be free.

And yet, the more resolute his reason became, the softer grew his heart; a mighty wave of sorrow came over him, as he thought of the horror of his position, and how cruel destiny had been in constituting him judge of those he ought naturally to have esteemed and loved. The file lay there on the table, and, in spite of the specious reasons Pierre advanced to prove to himself how legitimate were his investigations, it remained

there unopened. The image of his father seemed to appear before him, and in those smiling lips and beaming eyes he discovered the excuse for his hesitation.

He could not help loving this father of his, who had never addressed to him anything else than words of confidence and love. Must he believe, as it was insinuated he should, that all this charm of his was nothing more than a make-believe? It would have been very painful for him to admit that the soft, gentle voice which had called him 'my dear child' was false. He did not wish his father to be proved a hypocrite and a liar. Some portion of such meanness must fall on himself if Dartigues were a dishonest man. If the others judged him such, that was through malevolence or blindness. But why should he have espoused their quarrels? Was it not a very simple matter for him to disavow all interest in this trouble?

Bitterly discouraged, he saw that, in spite of his desire, such a course was impossible. His eyes fell on the file, lying there on the table, awaiting examination. Whether the revelations they contained were true or false, it was useless for him to refuse to accept them; they would reappear under some other form, perhaps, but he would never be able to escape them. In the struggle now entered upon each one would inevitably produce his proofs, and offer his arguments, whilst it would always be his heart which would suffer.

He closed his eyes the better to think of something else. Time passed, a kind of stupefaction seemed to take possession of his brain, wearied by the conflicting thoughts which had been passing through it. Stretched out in an armchair, he sat there in a reverie, without noticing that the daylight was vanishing, and darkness

slowly invading the room. The dull rumbling of the outside world, the sound of a chair pushed back in the neighbouring room, and the closing of a door, were faintly distinguished; the vague state of repose in which his senses were lulled seemed delightful to Pierre. He had abdicated all effort of will, rejected all thought. It was not sleep, but rather a perfect calm, that had come upon him, and all he cared for was that the pleasure might remain unbroken. It did indeed last long, but was finally broken upon by a light hand attempting to turn the door-handle and a voice exclaiming:

'Are you shut in, Pierre? . . .'

He rose to his feet, dazed, and with beating heart, uncertain as to what he ought to do. The voice continued in a slight tone of uneasiness:

'You make no reply, and yet I hear you. . . . Is there something the matter?'

Going over to the door, he drew the bolt, and opened it. There stood Madame Appel, holding a lamp in her hand. She looked at her son and smiled, then placed the lamp on the table close by the fire, which her eyes fell on unheedingly. Returning to her son, she laid her hands on his shoulders, and said:

'How pale you are! . . . Why were you in the darkness? It is at least three hours since you returned. . . . You were not working. . . .'

He stood there, a dull, uncertain look in his face. Francine grew alarmed at seeing him so troubled.

'My dear child, what is the matter now?'

He made no reply, but pointed to the file.

'Ah! these papers have been troubling you! What are they about?'

Stooping over the table, she read on the cover, written in a small, crabbed hand, the words: 'Dartigues Documents.'

'What is it?' she asked, puzzled.

He stammered out:

'A set of documents concerning my father. . . .'

'Have you read it?'

'No! I did not dare.'

'Have you been told anything about the contents?'

'I did not want to know.'

'How did it come into your hands?'

'I bought it.'

'With what object?'

'To remove it from my father's enemies.'

'You have done quite right.'

On hearing these words distinctly uttered, and full of a noble generosity, a tremor ran through Pierre's frame. A light seemed to enter his brain, bringing back his courage, and, seizing his mother in his arms, trembling between fear and hope, he said:

'Will you be my conscience, dear mother? Tell me my duty. Must I read this file, and thus learn what my father really is? Or must I turn aside and remain in ignorance?'

Francine gently disengaged herself from her son's arms. Her form seemed to enlarge, and her eyes shone, as she said in unhesitating tones:

'If these papers accuse your father, you ought to regard them as slanderous. Any son who consents to despise his father dishonours himself. Whatever he be, whatever he may have done, you ought to be his defender, under penalty of being a dishonourable man yourself!'

Pierre exclaimed :

'Ah ! now you bring me back to my right mind ! Yes, that is the truth ; I now see my duty !'

'Were you in doubt ?'

'There are moments when my conscience is darkened.'

'Poor child ! The trial you are now submitting to is a very hard one ! You have not yet learnt to suffer with resignation.'

Pointing to the file, she said :

'Take up these papers and come with me. . . .'

Pierre obeyed. His mother led the way to a small salon, where she quietly worked all day long at her sewing. A bright fire was burning in the room. Pointing to it, she said simply :

'Burn them !'

Pierre placed them on the fire ; a large flame sprang up and began to devour the leaves, which flew up the chimney one after the other, at last purified of their venom. Mother and son in silence watched this destruction, and when the final vestige of the deed of accusation drawn up against Dartigues had disappeared, Francine said :

'Forget all that, my child ; clean your thoughts from such filth. Learn never to despise or hate. Love is the only boon life can give.'

'Will that be permitted me ?' asked Pierre bitterly.

'Whether you remain kind and indulgent or not depends on yourself alone. During my life I have suffered greatly, I have shed many tears. Not once have I raved against destiny, for I had you by my side ; my love for you prevented me from despairing. Oh ! I have forgiven the wrong done me, and that fact has

been a great consolation to me. One must be indulgent. Pardon is an immense source of strength and a wonderful relief for the mind. Whatever happens, my child, never give way to hatred. You will certainly be rewarded by others as well as by yourself.'

Pierre sank down at his mother's feet. Leaning his head on her knees, he looked into her eyes, and said :

'Dear, dear mother! I know you are right. I feel myself more thoroughly convinced by your gentleness than I could ever have been by your anger. Never fear; you shall ever hold a unique place in my heart. I will obey you, for you are as good as you are indulgent. My dear good mother!'

The words died away on his lips, and he sat there; a sensation of perfect security had come over him; all his troubles had vanished, and he was once more a little child, as Francine, smiling, though filled with emotion, ran her fingers caressingly through her son's hair. Nothing interrupted this happy state of peace and tranquillity until Appel entered the room. He saw this son lying at his mother's feet, and after all the anxiety he had been passing through, the sight filled him with a delightful sensation of relief.

'Well, my dear children,' he said, 'I like to see you so. . . . Don't rise, Pierre; you are in your right place.'

He took a seat by their side, and, in simple language, related the divers trifling incidents of his day's work, the visits he had paid, and what had been said at the Faculté. All three felt a delicious joy at thus resuming their former habits. What had momentarily separated them was quite forgotten. All the uncertainties and troubles of the past six weeks disappeared in a calm full of confidence and security. They dined in the

best of spirits, delighting in the feeling of intimacy they had regained.

From that day forward Pierre made no further allusion to what had taken place between his father and himself. He appeared quite calm, and set to work on a publication he had commenced before leaving for Maillane, a very serious investigation on Trades Unions from the point of view of the French workman. All the same, he no longer went for advice to Des Barres, who, at the beginning, had given him very precious and luminous details as to the arrangement and composition of the work. One would have thought that he felt a dull kind of grudge against his master. The latter, in his generosity of heart and mental perspicacity, well understood the reasons of Pierre's coolness towards him. He showed no offence, for he knew only too well the weakness of human nature to be other than indulgent. He had explained matters to Appel, whom he saw every day.

'It does not surprise me in the least that Pierre keeps away from me. How could it be otherwise? He has suffered a great deal, and he must fall back on someone, for it is not in human nature to patiently endure grief. He will not accuse his father, and he cannot accuse you. Accordingly, it is on me he lets fall the whole burden of his resentment. And quite right too; I am far from complaining. Let the child take root once more in fertile soil, and live as he wishes, if only he gains strength. For, after all, he has not reached the end of his troubles; life has yet more than one surprise in store for him. You quite understand that Dartigues, who has never been checked by any person or thing, will not modify his plans with the object of sparing

his son a few moral shocks. He intends to succeed, whatever happens. His parabola is traced beforehand, like that of a shell shot from the cannon's mouth. And everything in the track of the projectile will be broken, until the moment when the projectile itself bursts. Then there remains to be seen what the explosion will produce.'

Indeed, the electoral campaign, though Pierre had no participation in it, was being relentlessly waged. Des Barres had gone to Maillane, and his presence there had produced a mighty sensation among the working classes. All the manufacturing hands and task-workers of the district, assembled in the theatre, had listened to the stirring eloquence of the great orator, and Des Barres' candidature had been loudly acknowledged. It was no longer a question of the Arbosque canal, any more than of the railway between Maillane and Arles, but rather of the destiny of the whole proletariat. To such as spoke meanly of private advantages, Des Barres had opposed the interests of the masses. In his mouth, the dreams of the Socialist party had taken upon themselves the character of universal reform. For the past two days the whole town had resounded with acclamation. Dartigues' partisans had kept silence. Langlèvès and Pagevin nightly repeated, at the Café du Commerce, Des Barres' speeches, showing that the proletariat was at last master of the bourgeoisie, and of the capitalistic fortress. They did not clearly explain what they meant by taking possession of the capitalistic fortress. But, from the heat of their language and gestures, it was easy to understand that it would be a glorious event, which would give the signal for the ruin of all

who owned anything, and would open out a new era of prosperity and especially of idleness for those possessed of nothing.

'We shall roll in wealth!' declared Langlèvès with a sweeping gesture. 'At last equality will reign!'

'But when there is nothing left, what will you do?' gently insisted a listener.

The wretch narrowly escaped being massacred beneath the table where he had taken refuge, pursued by the invectives of Langlèvès. Of all that Des Barres had demonstrated, in his broad conception of a happier humanity—a juster division of social duties, the organization of old-age pensions, co-operative institutions, the equitable alliance between capital and labour, both indispensable auxiliaries of national production—his partisans, narrow-minded and violent, had understood only one thing: the overthrowal of the established order of things.

Bréloquier, with a feeling of bitter sadness, had been present at this explosion of envy and hatred. At first he had been honest enough to attempt to undeceive the madmen, and to cool down their enthusiasm. He soon understood that to speak reasonably meant to compromise the success of Des Barres. Accordingly, the old veteran, whom human absurdity had turned into a sceptic, had done nothing to check the torrent of falsehood and error which was to bring to a successful issue his master's candidature.

He said to himself: 'The more all this changes, the more it is the same thing! In every popular movement, whether election or revolution, common-sense is forced to give way before stupid folly. When we proclaimed the Commune in Paris, our social conception

was a magnificent one. In a moment it was utterly spoiled by malefactors. Instead of reforming and organizing, they began to terrorize and banish from the country. Everything ended in blood and fire. And now here are these idiots of Maillane dreaming of seizing the reins of government and taking over the public funds! And all this because it has been explained to them that men, being equal, have a right to an equal amount of happiness. What moral and intellectual poverty! It is a pity young Pierre Appel has gone; we might have philosophized together on such an instance of electoral madness! What a humiliation for Des Barres to see his ideas perverted, his feelings travestied, and his hopes profaned in this way! And yet, one has to lean on this obtuse mass to succeed: progress can only be had at this price!'

'Waiter, an absinthe!'

And in the thought-poisoning liquor the former revolutionary tried to regain his youthful dreams, without succeeding in bringing back to mind any other than the morose realities of the present. And yet, the members of Dartigues' committee had not been inactive. They were not Utopists by any means; they knew quite well what they wanted, and in what direction they were going. The nomination of their candidate was to assure the triumph of a syndicate of interests. The Government secretly but strongly supported them. Dartigues had left for Paris, to bring himself into relations with his political patrons. His new home had been installed in the Avenue Hoche.

From the very first day the President's widow had found everything ready: the carriages in the coach-houses, all the trappings in the stables, and her sub-

scription for the Opéra on her dressing-table. The temperature, wonderful to relate, appeared tolerable to her, though this spring in Paris had often been as cold as during the past winter. But, then, Madame de Maillane was in Paris, where she was already preparing to cut a brilliant figure. Already the diplomatic agent of her country had called to ask if he could be of service to her in any way. She thought, sadly, that if the General had been alive, she would have been received officially, almost like a sovereign. Ever since his death, this was the first time she had regretted this sanguinary gorilla. But after all, if Dartigues had not the prestige of rank, he offered all the advantages of fortune. He made good use of his millions.

Bella, indifferent to all this luxury, had only seen in their arrival in Paris an opportunity of meeting Pierre. She was already astonished that he had given no news of himself since leaving Maillane. She had timidly pronounced his name in the presence of Dartigues, and had seen her father-in-law's face grow dark, as though he were annoyed at the allusion. Vague replies had been vouchsafed her : ' He will come shortly. He has lately been greatly occupied by important business matters. He will soon give some sign of life now. Besides, is he aware that we are in Paris ? The change was decided hurriedly. A single word, at the seasonable moment, will bring him to our side.'

Bella was not far from concluding that Dartigues had almost urged her to write. But she had no suspicion of what lay underneath the intrigue in which she had so innocently become implicated; she could not guess what worries and anxieties had come over Dartigues. The strong, confident man, whom nothing

had ever stopped in his path, and who put into execution the sternest plans without the slightest quiver of conscience, was now troubled and anxious for the first time in his life. This son of his, whom he had carried off from a café in Maillane, to remove him from his opponents, and use him in effecting his own triumph, had rapidly, and without his perceiving it, obtained a very real influence over his heart. Flattered at first by the vigorous and bold aspect of the handsome young man, in whom he imagined he saw his own youth reappear, he had afterwards been won over by the brilliant intellectual qualities Pierre manifested in their conversation. He had felt that his son was a remarkable man, not so much by qualities of brutal and vulgar energy such as had assured his own success, but by an aristocratic sensitiveness and grace. He had felt that Pierre almost belonged to another race, and had been flattered, in his rugged workman's nature of former times, to see himself live once more in this young man, who was so superior to himself.

He had only a vague notion of all this, though he was greatly influenced thereby. Ever since Pierre had left there seemed to be missing a part of himself. On reaching Paris, he had flattered himself that his son would immediately call on him. The journals had, with due pomp, mentioned his installation in the mansion of the Avenue Hoche. Rémançon had carefully prepared everything beforehand, and all kinds of means had been put into practice in proclaiming the entry of Dartigues into the capital, and yet Pierre remained away.

Rémançon, on being questioned, in order to prove that Dartigues' son was still interested in his father's

cause, had imagined he had done well in relating the purchase of the file from Galbran. In his simple-minded rascality, the business man did not admit that the son would sacrifice ten thousand francs with any other object than that of bringing these compromising papers to his father, to prove his gratitude thereby. Dartigues, however, did not regard the above-mentioned action in the same manner, and the giving over to Pierre of a file, drawn up by the ex-functionary, whose sentiments concerning him he was only too well acquainted with, seemed to him of such a nature as to bring about the most disastrous complications.

He did not discuss the matter with his companion, but remained silent, more gloomy than ever. The thought that all those heaped-up acts of infamy were under his son's eyes agitated him greatly. He, who generally was indifferent to everything, was now full of anguish and dread, whilst a cold sweat came over him as he thought, 'What will he think of all that?' His hope was that Pierre would not believe it. He went over again in his mind all the operations that had taken place in Tripoli, and which Galbran was well acquainted with.

In his heart, he could not understand what blame could be attached to him. He had always seen that mighty enterprises were conducted in that way. He had done nothing different from what others had done before him. Why should they reproach him for what generally passed unnoticed, even approved of, when the results obtained, though by unusual means, were advantageous? Yes, but how would the conscience of the world in general accord with his son's? What did he care for the opinion of others? He had only to deal with a single judge, and this one must not condemn

him. Despised by others, good ; anyhow, he meant to be respected by his son.

A smile of pain appeared on his lips. And so he, Dartigues, had come to this, that he subordinated everything to the opinion of a young man, when he had always placed his own advantage and will above the rule common to other men, like a despot, for whom ruin and tears form the indifferent price of triumph and glory. Were both his energy and intellect deteriorating ? Was the indomitable might which had permitted him to overcome all obstacles at last leaving him ? Was his fortune to come to a halt before this feeble barrier, the conscience of a child ?

In this process of self-examination, he spent the gloomiest hours he had lived ever since the change in his fortunes. He had the impression that everything was tottering about him, that the structure he had erected threatened to crumble away in a moment. A confidential friend would have been useful to him in these dark hours. Looking around, he saw only Rémançon and Barandet ; Claude Brun, the indispensable adviser in former times of trouble, was no longer there. In his wounded pride, indifferent, perhaps even hostile, he had left Dartigues to his own devices. A feeling of isolation now weighed upon Dartigues, and it was only by a violent effort that he asked himself :

' Why am I so dejected ? I am acting as though I were on the morrow of a disaster. Can I not gain the victory alone ? These auxiliaries of mine have never done anything than profit from my victories. Come ! A little courage, and I shall escape these difficulties, in spite of all !'

Meanwhile, Rémançon, determined to throw some light on the situation, which seemed to him very obscure, paid a visit to Amandine de Tresmes. The first question he asked her was :

'I suppose you go about a great deal. Since your return to Paris have you seen young Pierre Appel? Serious interests are at stake. You know that Dartigues is the father of this Pierre, to whom Galbran had handed over the file I was trying to purchase from him. . . . Well, Dartigues never hears a word of his son, and we wonder what is the meaning of it all.'

'Dear me! That can easily be understood! He must have read the file, and is none too well pleased to discover that his father is a rascal!'

'What! Are you forgetting that Dartigues is a friend of mine?'

'And that you are another, aren't you, now? What robberies you must have committed to be so rich, all of you! Ah! Don't deny; Galbran has told me all about you! If young Appel has guessed what you were about, it is not likely that he will have been struck with admiration at your proceedings. He was very anxious to know all about Dartigues, for when I went to Maillane . . .'

'To see me?'

'Yes; I called on Pierre, and he questioned me all the time about Dartigues and his past life. Even then he suspected something. . . . After this file of Galbran's, just think of the state he will be in. I can imagine myself in his place. Besides, Galbran will not stop there. . . .'

'I must see him,' said Rémançon distractedly.

'Shall I arrange it? I know where to find him, and I will make him unfold all his plans. . . .'

'Very well, I should be obliged to you if you would.'

'Oh! you may rely on me, never fear!'

The following day, as Rémançon was preparing to leave the house, the chamber-maid of Amandine called, the bearer of a letter from her mistress. The note was short, though explicit:

'My dear Friend,

'Be on your guard. There will be trouble before long. Galbran is terribly excited; he declares he has been deceived by young Appel, but that Dartigues shall gain nothing in consequence. I expect a scandal in the journals. Keep your eyes open.

'Amandine.'

Rémançon said to the chamber-maid, who was waiting, that there was no reply, gave her a louis, for he found it politic to treat generously the servants of such people as he had dealings with, folded the letter, and, after placing it in his pocket-book, set out for the Avenue Hoche, to inform Dartigues of what had happened.

CHAPTER X

BELLA had been unjust in accusing Pierre of indifference. The enamoured young man, from the very day of their arrival in Paris, had read in the journals all about it. Though determined not to call on his father, he had not been able to refrain from making an attempt to see Bella. He was acquainted with her habits, for he had often at Maillane accompanied her in her morning promenades, and was well aware that she would make no change in her life now that she was living in Paris, but that an early drive in the Bois de Boulogne would afford her as much pleasure as on the banks of the Arbosque. Accordingly, he had kept up a kind of espionage on the young girl; the Place de l'Étoile, indeed, seemed specially adapted for such a sentimental occupation. There was a tramway-office at the entrance to the Avenue Hoche, whilst the seats beneath the spreading trees were very convenient in prolonged waiting. The continual intercrossing of the people prevented the persistent presence of any observer being noticed. Pierre took up his position at this point about nine o'clock, and waited.

On the first day he saw his father drive past in a victoria, to which were harnessed two splendid trotters. The carriage turned down the Avenue des Champs Élysées, in the direction of Paris. He remained there

until noon, waiting to catch a glimpse of Bella, but all to no purpose. Sad at heart, he returned to lunch at the Rue du Luxembourg. The day seemed very long and irksome to him. On the following morning he returned to the same spot, and once more saw his father, in a magnificent turn-out, make his way to his business. Hidden in the crowd which Dartigues did not even deign to notice, he remained there, unperceived by his father, though the latter, at that very moment, was thinking of him, and was wondering at his son's silence.

Finally, about ten o'clock, in an elegant tilbury she was driving herself, he saw Bella appear, accompanied by one of her mother's maids, and by a groom. Obeying an irresistible impulse, Pierre sprang forward at that moment, just as a tramcar brought to a halt the carriage in which the young girl was seated, and there Bella caught sight of her fiancé standing close at hand. A sudden blush mounted to her cheeks as, with a cry of joy, she flung the reins to the groom, and, after whispering a few words to the lady-companion by her side, she descended from the carriage. With radiant eyes and outstretched hands, she offered the young man such a revelation of her love that he quivered with a feeling of pleasure, though not unmixed with pain. The memory of the position in which he found himself with regard to Dartigues tore his heart with anguish at the very moment he enjoyed the delight of feeling that Bella was wholly his.

'Ah!' said the young girl in a tone of reproach. 'So I have been reduced to the necessity of meeting you in the street? Have you so soon forgotten what you promised me at Maillane?'

'No, indeed, Bella, the reason I did not call on you was that I could not.'

She gave him a quick, searching look.

'I scarcely understand you. But we must not stay here in front of this omnibus office. We will walk on together.'

Turning towards her companion, she said:

'Mlle. Auger, I will leave you the carriage. Clement will drive. I shall walk in the direction of the Bois, along the Avenue, with M. Pierre. . . . Be good enough to keep within a reasonable distance, so that we may mount if we feel inclined to do so.'

The tilbury started, and Bella, turning to Pierre, said:

'Come along!'

Crossing the square without a word, they entered the sanded pathway, along the tree-shaded alley. Carriages, foot-passengers, horsemen breaking in hacks, old generals taking a constitutional on their war-horses, ladies in riding-habits accompanied by their husbands or their fathers, all continued their way along the emerald-green lawns, beneath the trees just bursting into bud, in the gentle spring air and the glorious sunlight. The water-sprinklers, plying their long rubber pipes in the morning light, seemed to pulverize the tiny rainbows they momentarily caused.

'How beautiful Paris is!' said the young girl. 'Nowhere in the world can a like charm be felt by visitors. It gives a fulness of pleasure to the physical as well as to the imaginative eye. One seems to be intoxicated by the very air. . . . How pleased I am to be here! . . . How happy, too, with you by my side! . . .'

Giving the young man a roguish glance, she added:

'And, indeed, you have made me wait for this pleasure. . . .'

'I have waited for it myself with no small amount of impatience,' he said, giving way to his emotion. 'Just now, when you met me, at the entrance of the Avenue Hoche, I was watching for you. . . . I was hoping you might pass, and that I should see you. . . . I have been looking for you in vain for two days.'

'What! You keep watch for me in the open street? Would it not have been far simpler to call and see me at home? . . .'

'No, Bella, that would have been much more difficult, not to say impossible.'

The young girl smiled, though a look of astonishment had come over her face.

'I cannot understand what you mean. . . . Have you become romantic? Must you complicate a situation in order to render it the more attractive? Are you going to ask me to listen to you from my balcony every evening? I must warn you that my room is on the second floor, overlooking the courtyard. . . . Listen to me: just come in the ordinary way, and dine with your father, and we can talk at our ease all the evening. We can make appointments for our morning walks.'

He shook his head in token of discouragement.

'You will see me no more at my father's house, Bella, for that is not my place. . . . So long as I was ignorant of the consequences my presence there might have, I was very pleased at being with him. I imagined I could enjoy in peace an affection I had been deprived of for so many years; besides, should I not meet you again? This thought was a

veritable joy to me. Suddenly, it was proved to me that, by placing myself on my father's side, I was showing myself lacking in gratitude towards those who have brought me up and loved me all my life; I saw that my new-born affection was tantamount to a treason. . . . Oh! I beg your pardon for relating you such a gloomy story; I ought to keep it to myself alone, for it is one of humiliation and pain. Still, it is the only means I have of explaining my conduct, and perhaps of obtaining your pardon. . . . I am unhappy, Bella. I do not think it possible for anyone to be more unhappy than I am. . . . I love you with all the strength of my soul, and yet am condemned to see you no more. . . . For pity's sake, do not blame me. . . . Were I to act otherwise, I should be a most unworthy son, for I should be betraying the best of mothers. My duty costs me many tears, for I see the future, which before seemed so glorious, filled as it was with you, now sad and desolate, because I now understand that we are to be separated for ever.'

As they spoke, they walked along side by side; no one would have suspected how their hearts were filled with anguish. From Pierre's eyes were flowing bitter tears he did not even take the trouble to brush aside.

Bella offered no interruption, though as she looked at him her dark eyes shone more than ever, and a sudden pallor overspread her cheeks. She allowed him to finish, as though weighing the importance of the words Pierre was uttering, then she said softly:

'Why are you so downcast, Pierre? What kind of an opinion have you been forming of me? Do you think I am a little obedient school-girl, whose tastes

are governed by the will of her parents? I know nothing of your European customs, and do only what I wish, when my reason and heart combined tell me I am not wrong. When you confessed to me your love, I promised you I would be yours. Do you suppose such engagements can be lightly entered upon, and that the slightest modification in the attitude of those about us can cause them to change? No, my dear Pierre; what was said in the garden at Maillane, as we gathered flowers together on the banks of the Arbosque, is not forgotten in Paris, amidst all this dazzling luxury, and never will be forgotten. . . . I am neither fickle nor false; so you need fear no longer. If you are as determined to retain your affection for me as I am to retain mine for you, it is true we may have difficulties to overcome, but nothing will effectively prevail against the union of our two hearts, and, sooner or later, happiness will be ours.'

He took the young girl's hand as it lay on his arm, and pressed it tenderly. He would have liked to raise it to his lips in the warmth of his gratitude. He admired Bella for her courage, and loved her for her frankness and sincerity. They had not been talking together an hour, and they had said all that was absolutely essential; they had confirmed their mutual love and fidelity. She was eighteen years of age, he twenty-five; at the very dawn of life, on a fine spring morning, they were offering testimony to their affection. What more could they desire?

At the entrance to the Bois they saw the carriage awaiting them. As they approached, Bella said:

'Dear Mademoiselle Auger, will you just drive quietly as far as the Allée des Acacias. We will meet

in front of the Tir aux Pigeons. It is so pleasant to walk on such a morning. . . .'

The tilbury once more started off to the trot of a vigorous black pony, champing its bit which was white with foam. Bella and Pierre followed gently along a pathway flanked with budding hedges.

'I do not wish you to tell me,' said Bella, after a moment's silence, 'the nature of the troubles whose consequences fall so heavily on you. Why should I know them, for I do not intend to judge anyone? If unfortunately I am compelled to take up sides, may it be as late as possible, and when there is no possible means of escaping from the difficulty. . . . Until then let us be everything to one another. Come, now, look at me. I don't wish to see you weep any more. If you return home with red eyes, and your mother knew you had met me, she might say to herself: "What a dangerous girl she must be!" She would form a bad opinion of me. . . . And I want her to love me also.'

'When you know her, you will not be long in loving one another. . . .'

'And that will not prevent me from continuing to love M. Dartigues,' said Bella firmly. 'I shall never forget how kind he has been to me ever since I have been living in the same dwelling. . . . Ingratitude is such an ugly and abominable sentiment!'

'He is good and kind, is he not?' exclaimed Pierre, his conscience greatly relieved. 'If you knew how terribly hard it is for me to be obliged to keep away from him! . . . He has been so gentle and devoted to me, and that quite sincerely, I am certain. . . . All the same, I cannot act otherwise than I am now doing in relation to him, for by so doing I should offend "the

others," who also have loved me, and that ever since I could think at all. To them I owe everything—my physical strength, my moral self-esteem. Ah! how well they have armed me with defensive weapons! . . . They had not foreseen, indeed, that some day I should have a terrible battle to wage, like the one in which I am now engaged. . . . But they had prepared me for the victory in giving me so fine an example of disinterestedness and probity! Professor Appel is a model of greatness and kindness, Bella, and my mother is a saint. . . . The bonds which unite me to them are indestructible, and yet, I love my father, whatever my conscience tells me against him. Now you know what I am suffering from, you see how difficult it will be for even your love to cure me.'

'Patience, my dear friend. Let time work; it will arrange everything, and solve the most difficult problems. I continually hear your father and his friends discussing different matters. In my opinion, they are very intelligent; they flatter themselves on their ease in surmounting obstacles and destroying all troubles along their path. They seem to take it for granted that one can escape from any kind of difficulty. Why should you be more pessimistic or despairing than they are?'

'The reason, Bella, is that the man who has scruples of conscience as he goes through life is as embarrassed and trembling as a child just released from leading-strings. Everything stops him, and makes him uneasy and hesitating. He is without experience, and yet, he must find the path. He would like to take the best, but how shall he choose? Here is a crossing of roads: shall he turn to the right or to the left? I

am this wretched man, Bella, passionate for nothing but honesty, wishing to do nothing but what is right, and yet, at every moment, knocking against all kinds of obstacles, brought into contact with duplicity, egoism, and evil. The apprenticeship I am making of life is very hard, and how unexpected! Hitherto I have never known suffering. I have been protected by my friends and relations from all difficulties, deceptions, and troubles. And now, here I find myself suddenly removed from home, exposed to all the variations and hardships of destiny. Those on whom I have been accustomed to lean in all circumstances, of whom I have asked advice, whose counsels always enlightened me, now envelop themselves in an impenetrable silence. I well know that they do so through delicacy and virtue, almost through heroism. But in abandoning me to myself, full of doubt and uneasiness, they leave me a prey to grief, and that is why I complain and rebel. I no longer know where I am going; I am completely lost, like the child in the fairy tale my mother used to read to me when a child. It is in vain that I look around me; there is nothing but solitude and darkness.'

'By following the impulse of your heart, you will be sure not to make a mistake. And whatever doubt you have will quickly be dissipated by your conscience. Besides, what is there deserving of blame that you could do? You are between two parties, and you love members of both of them. Well, is it not natural? Who would think of reproaching you for it? You will not show yourself lacking in gratitude by loving M. Dartigues, and who knows if, some day, you may not be able to help both sides? After all,

the important thing is that we two should be of one mind. If you cannot come to the Avenue Hoche, we shall see one another as we are now doing in the Bois. We shall not be greatly to be pitied. Besides, I will inform my mother of this, for I do not like to conceal from her whatever I do. . . . I do not think she will blame me for acting as my heart impels. She has always told me that I shall be mistress of myself. And it is not on your account that she will suddenly change her way of looking at things. Would you like me to mention our interview to M. Dartigues ?'

'Do so, if you think it necessary. But take great care how you speak to him. He must know that his candidature has exposed him to all kinds of complications. . . . Do not let him think that I have gone over to his enemies. . . .'

'Ah! *Mon Dieu!* How stupid is ambition! Why could he not have been contented with managing the different affairs he is engaged in ? What satisfaction will such a man, who is all-powerful in the world of commerce, feel when once he becomes a simple deputy, one of a crowd ? Here is a shepherd, who wishes to become one of the flock. . . . Now, I can understand the General, my father. He was alone, face to face with the nation. With a single stroke of the pen he could overthrow the proudest of Ministers; at his order, a valet of his household became governor of a province. . . . Everything trembled before him. . . . He had full control of the treasury, the navy, the army. . . . Last night I asked M. Barandet to explain for me the position of your deputies in France. It appears they receive a kind of salary of nine thousand francs, with tobacco-shops and schoolmasters' posts in their

gift. To think that they employ their utmost efforts for so poor a result! Far better be a mere citron-seller at Valparaiso! Tell me why your friend Des Barres is so bent on being elected, and why he does not give way before M. Dartigues.'

'Ah! Bella, the reason is that Des Barres is a reformer, who is anxious to put his ideas into practice. Now, it is only before the Bar of the Chambre that one can make one's voice heard by a whole nation. You understand, it would be a great misfortune if Des Barres were not returned to Parliament. This is acknowledged even by his opponents, though they dread. . . .'

'Very well! Let him offer himself elsewhere!'

'My dear child,' said Pierre, smiling at last, 'you speak of all this as though it were quite simple. Alas! it is no more possible for Des Barres to withdraw now than for one's opponent to withdraw when swords are crossed in a duel. Des Barres has a whole party at his back; whatever he might wish, he is obliged to go forward. As someone said long ago, he is their chief; he must follow them.'

'Just think, Pierre: all these followers of theirs will do all kinds of horrible actions in favour of the two candidates.'

'I am afraid you are right; you see clearly how matters stand. We are like travellers in two trains, started on the same line against one another, and which their drivers are incapable of bringing to a halt. A frightful crash will take place, and who can tell how many will be crushed to death?'

'Let us try to keep clear of the disaster. Be careful; remember that you do not altogether belong to your-

self. The very least you can risk in this adventure is my peace of mind. . . . For henceforth, whatever affects you will affect me equally. . . .'

'Dear Bella!'

They continued in silence. The Allée des Acacias lay before them in the brilliant sunlight away to the blue horizon, gnarled old trees lining the path on either side. Suddenly, a herd of white does sprang out of the copse, their customary tranquillity disturbed by the barking of a dog which was running blithely about the grass; the pretty tame animals trotted along the path, without paying the slightest attention to either carriages, riders, or foot-passengers. Pierre and Bella followed their lazy flight through the copses, and the young girl said with a smile:

'It seems to me that men cannot be very cruel in this Paris of yours, where the very beasts themselves are tamed. . . .'

'Alas!' said Pierre; 'the truth is that the beasts are far better than the men.'

They had reached the carriage, in which Mademoiselle Auger was patiently awaiting the return of the young girl. Extending her hand to Pierre, Bella said:

'Good-morning! I have enjoyed my walk immensely. To-morrow, I suppose? Same place and same time?'

'Yes, if you wish it so.'

He helped her to mount, saw her take up the reins, after which the carriage began to move away. He remained there motionless, watching the one he loved, until, at a turn in the alley, the charming vision disappeared from sight, and Pierre, with joyful heart, returned to Paris.

The note Amandine de Tresmes had despatched to Rémançon summed up the situation only too faithfully. Two days after Galbran had learnt that revenge was slipping from his grasp, and that the ten thousand francs he had received for the Dartigues file formed the only advantage he would gain from his treacherous act, a most perfidious article had appeared in the Radical journal, the *Pavé de Paris*, dealing with the candidate for Maillane and his partisans. In light, witty expressions, Dartigues' private life and his business relations in both continents were intermingled with the blood-stained political career of President Hermandez. The chance speculations of the latter were compared with the tragic adventures of the former, and the district of Maillane was destined to be exploited as a fief by this revenue farmer, with the support of the Government.

The most slanderous insinuations were directed against Dartigues, who was presented as the incarnation of every kind of capitalistic corruption and cruelty. The Minister of Public Works and the President of the Council were both discussed and vilified, the former with reference to the railroad proposal, the latter with regard to the candidature at Maillane. Finally, as a Parthian shot, a question was announced for a coming sitting of the Chambre, as to ' whether or not the reign of filibusters, inaugurated at Panama and in the railroads of the South, still continued.'

The moralist who had written this vigorous article had no intention that those against whom it was directly or indirectly aimed should remain in ignorance of the fact, for copies of the journal, duly marked in red pencil at the pregnant passages, had been for-

warded to Dartigues and to Pierre. The respective clerks of the different Ministers had heard of the news during breakfast. The Minister of Public Works looked serious, whilst the President of the Council was in a rage—a mere matter of temperament. As for the Minister of the Fleet, who had also been attacked, he relieved himself by a few vigorous oaths. He was an old sea-dog, and though he had been attacked with reference to the port of Gabès, he really cared not one jot; it might even be said that the dismay of his colleagues gave him a certain secret satisfaction.

Dartigues' first impulse had been to start off at once for the office of the journal. But Barandet had prudently checked him, for he was afraid a violent scene might ensue. He undertook to obtain information in his place. This was the first time that Dartigues, since his return from America, had had to deal with the boundless and sovereign liberty of the press. He had only to put his foot on to the field of politics to immediately expose himself to attack. He felt astonished and annoyed, but not afraid. Not yet had he calculated the consequences of the blow he had received. He was conscious of the attack, but thought: 'All this can be settled. The journalist shall be bought over, and, if need be, the journal too. After all, what is there at the bottom of it all? Mere extortion by threatening exposure.' He well knew how such matters were settled.

How much hush-money had he himself given in his life! He had seen so many hands open, even those of princes, to receive the coveted gold, when skilfully offered! How could it be supposed that a journalist could be met with, whose conscience could not be

bought, or a journal exist whose views could not be modified, if only the right price were given ? And yet an unexpected sensation was in store for him about four o'clock, when Barandet returned. His friend looked woefully discouraged, and sank into an armchair in front of Dartigues, who forced a smile to his lips. Barandet said :

' This is a terrible state of things. The article has been written by Bertier-Massol, a Paris deputy. He told me he had in his possession a detailed set of notes, which would permit of his demanding explanations of the Minister under conditions which would be disastrous for you. . . .'

' Ah !' exclaimed Dartigues.

Then the practical side of his character immediately appeared as he asked :

' What object has Bertier-Massol in view ? It is not for the pleasure of annoying me and harassing the Government that he has entered upon this campaign. What does he want ?'

' He told me quite frankly he wants you to abandon your candidature at Maillane.'

' So he is working for Des Barres ?'

' Like all the rest of his party.'

' So it is Des Barres who has directed the *Pavé de Paris* against me ?'

' Everything seems to warrant such a supposition.'

' Des Barres !'

Dartigues in his anxiety began to walk up and down the study. A dull feeling of indignation began to awake in him at the thought that it was Des Barres who was pressing him so vigorously, whilst, in thought, he associated this attack with the disappearance and

silence of Pierre. Ever since his son had left Maillane he had been without news of him. All that he knew he had learnt from Rémançon, and that had reference to the purchase of Galbran's file. Suddenly his heart seemed to stand still. From whom had Bertier-Massol received the information he was supposed to possess? Had the file bought by Pierre been handed over to Des Barres?

The thought of such a treacherous act appeared to him so atrocious that he immediately dismissed it with horror. No! Pierre had never handed over Galbran's file to the enemies of Dartigues. Still, he had had it in his possession, and had perhaps given way to the impulse to read it. As he thought of the different incidents with which the ex-functionary was acquainted, Dartigues' brow darkened. How was it that these things, which before had seemed so simple, and which he had carried through without the slightest hesitation, now seemed so suspicious and unworthy in his eyes? From what point of view was he now looking at them to find them so different? Had a new conscience been awakened in him at the thought of his moral responsibility towards his son? Was it not now rather what Pierre would think of his father's acts than what Dartigues might think of himself which caused him so much trouble? A cold perspiration came over him. Turning towards Barandet with regained energy, he said in angry tones:

'All the same, I shall certainly not give way before such threats! They may attack me; I shall defend myself. I will buy up the journals. Am I a man likely to be discouraged so easily? I have passed

through worse fortune than this. But who has directed the blow against me ?'

'Ah !' exclaimed Barandet anxiously, 'that is the serious part of the whole affair. It cannot be any but one of those most intimate with us who could have played the traitor. . . . The one who informed Bertier-Massol was as well acquainted with your business as you are yourself. . . .'

Dartigues stopped short, looked at Barandet, and in threatening tones asked :

'Do you suspect anyone ? If so, name him !'

'Ah ! Name him yourself. You well know of whom I am thinking.'

'Claude Brun ?'

'Certainly ! Where has he been for the last fortnight ? On business, either at Gabès, attending to the works there, or at Maillane pushing forward the election ? Nothing of the kind ! He is in Paris, where he has been doing all he can against you. Ah ! you have sorely displeased him ! That was a great mistake !'

Dartigues grew pale with anger, then the blood suddenly rushed to his face, and he was obliged to lean against the mantelpiece to prevent himself from falling.

'Could I act otherwise ? He threatened me ! He wanted to impose on me. . . .'

'Ah ! you should have promised him all he asked for. . . . Though you might have refused him everything later on . . . Circumstances always allow one to draw out of a bargain.'

This was their usual unscrupulous way of proceeding, and, under other circumstances, Dartigues would have followed the advice. Now, however, Pierre was in

question, and already the ascendancy the young man had gained over the mind of his father no longer allowed the latter to act in such a summary fashion. In earnest accents he replied :

'Impossible! He wished to marry Bella. And my son loves her.'

Barandet murmured his disapproval, as he replied :

'My dear Dartigues, allow me to inform you that you committed a very foolish act in interesting yourself in this young man. You were going straight ahead in full liberty and strength, and now you have burdened yourself with this embarrassing son of yours, with his puritanical ideas, and in league with your greatest enemies. All that is now happening is merely the consequence of your mistake. Still, there is yet no irreparable harm done. I am given to understand that the article of Bertier-Massol is founded on mere hearsay. . . . He is awaiting proofs in support of his statements before deciding to ask the Government for an explanation. . . . If it is Claude who has promised to supply him with these proofs the only thing to be done is to disarm Claude, and Bertier-Massol will be left in the lurch. . . .'

'Then I should have to consent to his demands? . . . Impossible! I will not do it!'

'Send for him, and talk over the matter. You can easily win him over; it will not be the first time you will have done so. That is a game you know well how to play. But, for Heaven's sake, don't assume a determined, unbending attitude! Softly! Softly! Business is not transacted by adopting an uncompromising attitude, and acting according to preconceived notions. . . .'

'You say Claude Brun is in Paris. . . . Is this a mere supposition, or are you sure of what you allege?'

'I am absolutely certain of it. . . . I met him yesterday. . . . He saw me quite distinctly, but turned aside from my path. . . . I tell you again, everything comes from him. . . . He is acting from a spirit of revenge. . . . What can you have done to make him so hostile to you?'

Dartigues made no reply. He sat there, buried in reflections. After a few moments' silence he raised to Barandet a calm, smiling face and said:

'You are right. I must see him and try to convince him. . . . Will you kindly ring him up on the telephone and ask him, in case he is at home, to call on me?' . . .

'Certainly!' exclaimed Barandet in a tone of satisfaction. 'Now you are your own self once more. . . . It is no longer a violent and headstrong Dartigues, but a gentle, insinuating Dartigues who is about to commence operations. . . . Under such circumstances success is assured! . . .'

The old beau was already tapping away at the apparatus in a corner of the study. A moment later the bell rang. Meanwhile Dartigues sat there buried in reflection. An anxious look had come over his face. The whole of his past life sprang vividly before his mind, and Claude Brun, whose influence was now being exercised in so treacherous a manner, reappeared as he had known him in the years of his early manhood. Was it not he whose evil counsels had led him away from France and Europe? Was it not he whose insinuations regarding Francine had brought trouble into the family, and occasioned the departure of the husband? He knew him to be a hard man

and full of egoism. But he was also aware that Brun was a coward, and incapable of resisting him face to face. The intuition had come to him as it had to Barandet that the author of this secret attack on himself was Claude. The moral impossibility of compromising with him, without sacrificing Pierre, had shown him how useless it was to do as Barandet had advised. He was now thinking of the means he should employ to win over the traitor. Already a smile of disdain came into his face. Claude Brun oppose Dartigues? Who could have foreseen such a thing? Could it be admitted as at all possible?

Barandet's hand was laid on his shoulder.

'Well! You see I was right. . . . The reply comes that he returned to Paris last night. . . . A falsehood! . . . But we may let it pass all the same. . . . He is taking a cab to come here immediately. . . . In a quarter of an hour he will be at your disposal. . . . Take care to win him over! Now I must leave you. . . .'

'Shall I see you this evening?'

'Yes, I am going to the Ministry to see the President of the Council and pacify him. . . . These old revolutionaries are astonishing creatures! . . . Once in power, they immediately forget all they did to others when they were in the Opposition, and cry out in despair whenever their opponents attack them. . . .'

After shaking hands with Dartigues, he left the study. From the garden, consisting of a green lawn surrounded with flower-beds and chestnut-trees already in leaf, the whole sheltered by the lofty walls of the neighbouring houses, a series of joyous barks drew Dartigues' attention to the window. There he saw Bella's chestnut-coloured poodle playing with the

young girl. Dressed in a blue cloth tailor costume, she was strolling to and fro till the time should come for her rendezvous with Pierre in the Bois. With her tanned glove she was teasing the dog, which was madly running round her in rapid circles. Bella's tranquil youth and smiling charm formed so strong a contrast with the elderly and sarcastic image of Claude Brun he had just been dwelling on that the utter impossibility of conciliating these two beings, so unlike one another, both physically and morally, presented itself to his mind with irresistible force.

Besides, suppose he were to yield to Claude Brun in the matter, and leave him the field free to pay court to Bella, what would it lead to? Madame Hermandez's daughter could in no way be influenced by Dartigues. And if she loved Pierre, who could constrain her to marry this graybeard? What Brun had asked his ally to do was to refrain from favouring Pierre. But what was the use of trying to influence the wills of these enamoured young people? They loved one another, and that was all there was to say. Then what hope remained of arranging matters with Claude Brun? Appeal to his reason, to his interests? Yes, perhaps. To sentiment or to generosity? Vain hope! He knew his companion only too well, and was aware that no delicacy of sentiment could be expected from him. Over in the docks at Gabès, in the burning summer heat, when dysentery had decimated the dock labourers, he had seen him pass calmly in front of the widows and orphans, who, with streaming eyes, stood there begging for bread, without a single look of pity or sympathy softening the harshness of his features. Women and children—a fine

brood, indeed! The husbands and fathers had been paid all the time they had worked, had they not? He owed them nothing. Then away with all this troublesome pack of beggars! The starving rabble merely kept alive the contagion! Ah! pity from Claude Brun! As well try to extract tears from a stone! Still, he was prudent and shrewd. Perhaps a threat might succeed in disarming him.

A sound of opening doors was heard, a step, then the voice of the valet saying, 'M. Brun,' and Claude stood in Dartigues' study. A smile was on his face and he approached without the slightest timidity, as though he had left his friend the previous night on the best of terms. After shaking hands with Dartigues, he said:

'You sent for me. It was unnecessary, for I was on the point of calling on you. What is the matter?'

Dartigues pointed to the journal, marked in red, lying on the table, and replied:

'That is what is the matter.'

A sudden light entered Claude's eyes. He immediately lowered his eyelids, as though to veil his sentiments. In careless accents he said:

'Ah! The article in the *Pavé* . . . Yes, but what importance has that, a mere sheet of printed paper? Nothing whatever! It is not the first time we have been insulted, and we have not moved a hair. Why should this trouble you?'

'It is not the article in itself, but rather the suspicion that I have been betrayed by an intimate friend.'

'An intimate friend?' repeated Brun, as though wondering who the guilty person could be. 'Indeed! Who is he?'

Dartigues looked steadily at him as he exclaimed :

'Yourself !'

'I ? Betray you ? Why ! it would be as though I were to betray myself. You and I are only one !'

'Indeed !'

'Do you think me so stupid ? . . .'

'I think you so full of hatred against me !'

'Why should I hate you ?'

'Because I have ceased favouring you.'

Brun gave an ugly laugh, and showed his teeth as though he were on the point of biting. With a disdainful shrug of the shoulders, he said :

'I am no longer in need of others, though others are in need of me. I know what I am worth, nor do I intend to become an object of disdain. . . .'

'You know what you are worth. . . . Well, then, state your price. Perhaps we shall reach some understanding. . . .'

Brun looked up at Dartigues, and said eagerly :

'Have you come back to your right mind ?'

'How could it be otherwise ? . . . Your arguments are irresistible. . . .'

Claude was deceived by Dartigues' good-nature. He began to believe that a capitulation was possible.

'Ah ! If you would only serve me as I asked you to do at Maillane, and as you so harshly refused ! . . .'

'Well ! well ! let us come to some agreement. . . . You confess it was you who gave information to Bertier-Massol ?'

'Was it not fair fighting ?'

'Granted ! But what have you given him besides the notes for his article ?'

'Nothing yet ! I swear it upon my honour !'

'Upon your honour!' said Dartigues bitterly. 'I should prefer some other guarantee. . . . However, let it pass. . . . What documents were you intending to hand over to him? . . . So prudent a man as Bertier would not enter upon so serious a libel accusation without insisting on written proofs. . . .'

'All the accounts referring to the Gabès commissions. . . .'

'Then you kept them?'

'Yes.'

'It was agreed between us that they should be destroyed. . . .'

'Ah! was it possible to destroy such weapons?'

'To use them against one's partner?'

'You see that I was quite right in doing so.'

'And where are these accounts?'

'At my address. Lavardan is keeping them for me. . . .'

'Your secretary. . . . And he knows what he has in his possession?'

'Certainly not! The packet is sealed; he has nothing but the key of the desk containing it. . . .'

'And if you wrote asking him to send it to you, or to hand the packet to the bearer of a note from you? . . .'

'He would assuredly part with it.'

'Very good! Sit down in front of this desk, and write asking him to bring me the packet.'

'And afterwards?'

Dartigues drew Claude to the window, and pointing to Bella, who was walking to and fro in the garden—'There! Look at her!' he said.

'Will you give her to me?' asked Claude in trembling accents.

'Give me the packet first; we will see afterwards.'

'Ah! you are trying to cheat me once more. However, you shall have nothing form me without a pledge.'

'What pledge do you want? You know that time is pressing, and that Bertier-Massol is waiting.'

'Yes, I am well aware of the fact. Ah! I have you now in my power!'

'Then what do you want?'

Claude came close to Dartigues, and, with an air of threatening authority, said:

'I demand that you, in the presence of Madame Dartigues and of Bella, declare me to be the arbiter of your future, which I can, at my pleasure, destroy or confirm, and that both mother and daughter give me a solemn promise that I shall marry Bella. Once they have given me their word of honour, I shall be reassured, and you will find me once more your humble servant. . . .'

'And the alternative?'

'The packet shall be in the hands of Bertier-Massol this very evening, and you may look forward to a disaster.'

Dartigues clenched his fists together with such force that the very joints cracked. He turned towards Claude so terrifying a visage that his accomplice turned pale.

'Dartigues! . . .' he exclaimed.

'Write!' said the other, pushing him in front of the desk. 'I will allow you three minutes to write to Lavardan, ordering him to send you the packet here. . . . No resistance! . . . Your very life is at stake!'

'Are you going mad ?'

'If, within three minutes, you have not written to your secretary, as true as you are the greatest villain this earth has ever tolerated, I will send a ball through your head with this revolver.'

He had opened a drawer, from which he took the weapon, which he now laid against Claude's forehead. The latter turned aside, and said calmly :

'I know what I wanted to know. It is useless to threaten me ; I set you a trap, into which you fell at once. Lavardan has no documents to keep at all. . . . I will write to him if you like, but it will be to no purpose. . . . Don't be afraid; I have taken every precaution, and if you were to lose possession of yourself so far as to make away with me, in addition to the Gabès affair, you would have the Avenue Hoche affair on your hands. . . .'

'Wretch !' roared Dartigues.

'Ah ! ah ! Fool, too, I suppose ! You think you can rid yourself of Claude Brun as you can of a feeble old servant. What would you have been without me ? Dead, long ago, of hunger or debauchery ! Are you under the illusion that you are of any worth whatever ? You are well aware that you have never been anything but a mere puppet in my hands. It is I who have advised you in all you have undertaken, and all the public success you have had has been secretly prepared according to my plans. Unlike you, I am not fond of the broad daylight ; I have no wish to parade about and expose myself to public gaze. The result gained is sufficient for me ; I am perfectly willing to leave the glory and responsibility to others. And much good has it done you, vain puppet as you

are! I am not compromised in the slightest, though quite as rich as you are. You are the only one who has put himself in the front, consequently you must pay for all of us. Then pay at once, and that without any ceremony. Just now you called me a wretch. I would recommend you to use no more such appellations.'

Dartigues turned white with impotent rage.

'You will not crush me so easily as you imagine. All my difficulties have arisen from this candidature. . . . Their attacks are directed against me as a politician. I will abandon all idea of offering myself at Maillane.'

Claude gave a scornful whistle.

'Do you think that will change the situation in any way? If Bertier, once he sees no reason for attacking you, abandons the idea of questioning the Government on your quasi-official candidature, I shall simply pass on the documents to a deputy of the Opposition, who will bring in questions regarding the jobbery scandals. . . . In whatever event, you may depend on it that you cannot escape except by obeying me.'

'Give me time to reflect.'

'No, you would escape me.'

'Do you want to ruin me?'

'A few minutes ago you wanted to kill me.'

'Can I force Bella to obey my orders?'

'No, but you can enlighten your son as to the danger his love for Bella makes you run. . . .'

'Reveal to him such acts of infamy?' exclaimed Dartigues.

'You were not so severe formerly. You regarded them as mere peccadilloes.'

'But then . . . to mention them to Pierre . . .'

'He will prefer to hear of them privately rather than publicly.'

'And in return for what should I ask him to make me such a sacrifice?'

'Is he not your son?'

'To his misfortune only will he have become so!'

'Indeed! You placed yourself in his way, to make him serve your designs!'

'Ah! I did not know him then!'

'How sentimental you have become all of a sudden! When you left him and his mother at the same time, you seemed to care very little!'

'Should I have to tell him all that also?'

'Don't be troubled on that point! His mother has already done so.'

'Then he will refuse me any concession or help whatsoever.'

'It is to his interest to extricate you from your difficulties. He is your son.'

'But he is in love with Bella.'

'Then he will fall out of love with her. You, too—you were in love with Francine.'

'You wretch! And she loved me in return, though you basely slandered her, to induce me to leave her. You caused me to commit, in doing so, an irreparable act of infamy! For what reason?'

'To make of you, first of all, a rich man, and afterwards a powerful and influential ruler, if you will only obey me.'

'I cannot! See Pierre. . . . Tell him all. . . . No. . . . No. . . . It is beyond my strength. . . . He would never forgive me. . . .'

'Probably not! And at the same time, he would be for ever separated from Bella. . . . Come, now! You see how necessary it is. It is the only solution.'

Claude saw that Dartigues sat there crushed in his armchair. He gave his companion a look of pity, and, with a shrug of the shoulders, said:

'Come! come! Really, you make me feel quite sorry for you. I should never have believed it. . . . Shall I undertake the commission?'

'To speak to my son?'

'No. He is too hot-headed; he might fly into a passion. I will call on Dr. Appel, and inform him of the situation. . . .'

'Appel! Why not tell Francine everything? Appeal to their pity after what I have done! Impossible!'

'It is the sole means of obtaining Pierre's renunciation.'

'I will not do it!'

'Are you joking?'

'I will not, I tell you.'

'Then you will allow the Gabès affair to be brought before the Chambre?'

'I will not be an unworthy father, after having been an unworthy husband. . . .'

'You will sacrifice yourself for your son?' sneered Claude.

'It is my turn now. I have sacrificed too many already for myself.'

Dartigues had risen, his face tortured by grief, though a look of peace and inner satisfaction appeared in his eyes. His mind was at last made up.

'Recollect,' said Claude, 'that you are flinging

yourself into the water, as Gribouille did, to avoid getting wet. The scandal which will take place in the Chambre will be as fatal to your son as your revelations could be. . . .'

'But I shall not be obliged to feel the shame of asking him to sacrifice his love to my safety.'

'He will keep away from you and Bella. And that will be the same thing.'

'Then be satisfied with this solution, and do not impose additional torture on me.'

'Think over the matter. You have until this evening. . . . Don't be unreasonable, Dartigues; you are risking your position on the fortune of a single card.'

'And you are risking your life, remember.'

'What is my life to me? It has no value whatever if I cannot win the one with whom I am passionately in love.'

'Your project is an infamous one!'

'So you regard it, because it is an obstacle to your own plans. If it pleased you, you would find it quite natural. Don't belie, Dartigues, in a single moment the very principles which have carried you through life. Nothing is good which is not advantageous. Just consider where your advantage lies. . . .'

'I am quite aware now.'

'Shall I send Rémançon, to speak of the matter with you? . . .'

'I will follow no one's advice.'

'Don't look upon me as your enemy; it is rather yourself who are becoming mine.'

'You are worrying me. Leave me to myself.'

Claude Brun leaned over to Dartigues, and pointing

to the revolver lying on the table, he whispered in his ear :

'Don't decide on anything extreme ; let there be no blood shed. . . . Death would afford no solution whatever, and the situation would remain the same.'

Dartigues made no reply. He sat there, with head sunk on his breast, motionless, and suffering. Claude Brun gave an ugly laugh as he said :

'If your enemies were to see you at this moment, they would look upon you as having been overrated. If one will be a villain, better be one thoroughly. Come, now, Dartigues. Au revoir !'

And, without waiting for a reply, he left the room.

CHAPTER XI

PIERRE, as well as Dartigues, had received the journal, marked in red. At first a feeling of stupefaction had crushed him. Seated in front of his table, with the accusing paper in his hands, he had read it twice, the better to understand. Then a sentiment of anger had come over him. Rising to his feet, his first impulse had been to call on Professor Appel. The doctor was in his study, preparing his lecture before going to his clinic. There was only a door to open, and Pierre would have found both comfort and counsel. But he had been held back by the shame of having to speak once more of his father to Appel, and under what humiliating conditions!

He stifled a cry of pain. How hard life was! And again, just as one was learning to know it, what bitter sorrows must be borne, what crushing servitude endured! He had no part, personally, in all these painful happenings. He was suffering solely on account of others. There was always, alas! the heavy debt of misfortune he was obliged to pay, the interest of which ran on for innocent and guilty alike. In his trouble, he thought of calling on Des Barres. The Socialist leader was intimate with Bertier-Massol. Perhaps he would be able to exercise some influence over him!

Everything that was hostile to Dartigues had, after all, as its object the success of Des Barres' candidature. Yes, the idea was an excellent one. He would call on Appel's old friend, and discover with his help some means of defending Dartigues. A sad smile came over the young man's pallid face at this proposition, so abnormal a one of asking help for his father from the very rival of that father. Would he have thought of begging Dartigues to spare Des Barres if the latter had been in his opponent's power? Alas! he now clearly saw on which side were real generosity and greatness of character. The way to judge men is by their acts. Not for a moment could Pierre doubt that Des Barres would be ready to do all he could to prevent the young man from suffering. Could he have expected so much from his father?

He set off on his mission, and as he went, the truth by degrees illuminated his conscience. The obscure past of Dartigues had some light thrown on it by his risky present. Pierre knew nothing precise, since neither Appel nor his mother had been willing to speak, through respect for his filial devotion, and because he himself, with Galbran's file in hand, had refused to open it. But Dartigues' life was its own condemnation. By degrees his conduct appeared in its real light to his son's judgment. And in this light Francine and Appel stood out greater and purer, worthy of every mark of respect and love. This caused Pierre profound grief as well as sincere joy. The light of truth almost blinded him, but he was determined to be brought into its full presence. Reaching the office of his master, the cross-grained old servant came to open the door.

'Ah! it is M. Pierre! Well, well! Monsieur will indeed be pleased to see you. . . . He was speaking of you all the time last night with M. Bréloquier.'

Crossing the room, she shouted out:

'Monsieur, it is M. Pierre Appel! . . .'

Des Barres was seated in front of his desk, correcting proofs. Raising his head, he said:

'You old fool, cannot you announce a visitor quietly, instead of shouting out as though you wished to rouse the whole quarter?'

'You are never pleased!' growled the servant. 'Whenever visitors are brought straight into your study, without your permission, you must make some remark or other. Think of it! It will soon become impossible to serve you at all!'

Des Barres, with socratic tranquillity, said gently to the servant:

'Leave us.'

Closing the door with a bang, she left the room. Des Barres arose, took his pupil by the hand, and after indicating a seat, he looked at him keenly and said:

'I was expecting you. I knew you would be here this morning.'

'The article, you mean?'

'Yes, the article. But don't alarm yourself. Bréloquier has already seen Bertier-Massol this morning, and we are endeavouring to settle the matter. . . .'

'Ah, my friend!'

Pierre, keenly affected, had flung himself into Des Barres' arms.

'Come, now! You never imagined I would allow you to be troubled? You are not surprised at what I am now telling you?'

'Not at all; I was certain of you.'

'That is right! Well, now, let us talk the matter over. This is a very important affair, for publicity gives everything an enormous influence. A patent medicine or an atrocious libel is thrown out to the public with equal ease. One may save life, the other poison it. But the press has done its work; it has scattered the news throughout the country. When Bertier undertook this affair, he was ignorant of the importance of the act they were entrusting to him. . . .'

'They? Whom do you mean—they?'

'Ah! there is the key to the whole question; you have placed your hand right on it. The article has not been written to help me, but rather as a threat against Dartigues. Bertier thought of nothing else than being serviceable to me. He did not know that the man who had supplied him with the information was pursuing a personal revenge. Really, he must have acted in accordance with the lowest possible motives. . . .'

'Who is he?'

'A friend of your father's; his companion and partner. . . .'

A flood of light seemed to illuminate Pierre's brain as he exclaimed:

'Claude Brun?'

'Yes.'

'Ah! now I understand everything! He is attempting to kill two birds with one stone: torturing the very man who has enriched him, and obliging him to sacrifice me. It is against me, specially, that this frightful plot has been woven!'

'In what way?'

Then, in violent terms he was incapable of moderating, Pierre related to Des Barres the story of his love for Bella, the hopes she had given him, the satisfaction his father had felt at the thought that a marriage with Mlle. Hermandez would definitely unite his son to himself, and, finally, the anger of Claude Brun, the jealousy of the old despised lover, and the bitterness he had thereby felt against Dartigues. Now everything was quite clear: he was attacking Dartigues as a punishment for having favoured Pierre, and perhaps in the hope of compelling him to modify his plans. The young man's passion enabled him to understand with wonderful clearness. As though fully acquainted with his rival's intentions, he had in a very short time laid bare the whole scheme. Des Barres sat there buried in reflection, whilst Pierre poured out all kinds of protests and invectives. Finally, the veteran said:

'Just think, my child, how stupid Claude Brun's calculations really are. He has no means of compelling the woman he is in love with to marry him. Mlle. Hermandez has only to give a graceful refusal to his offer of marriage, and this fool's elaborate plans will all be shattered. He may, under pressure of his threats, force Dartigues to cease countenancing you; he may even oblige Mme. Dartigues to consent to receive him, to save Dartigues' social standing. Again, he may hope that you, through a sentiment of chivalry and sacrifice, will renounce marrying the one you love. But how will he compel Mlle. Bella, who loves you, to give herself to him? You see, Claude Brun is an idiot; even his rascality

is without a solid foundation. He will bring misery on those he hates, but even then he will not succeed in compassing his own happiness. Perhaps the infliction of harm will satisfy him, for there are certain natures so depraved that they find a greater satisfaction in destroying than increating.'

Pierre was boiling over with indignation before his friend's calm and lucid arguments. He said:

'Cannot he be prevented from doing any harm?'

'Doubtless, he may be.'

'In what way?'

'Oh! do not be uneasy about the means. We will find some way out of the difficulty.'

'Time is flying. . . .'

'Well, we are on the right side. Bertier-Massol will do nothing without consulting me. We are protected in that direction, at any rate. . . .'

'But suppose this villain of a Claude Brun were to appeal to another? . . .'

Des Barres smiled.

'You don't reason badly, my child. After a little experience, you will become quite an interesting political tactician. Old Des Barres will bring you out. . . . Meanwhile, rely on him for defending you. Just see, Pierre, how well things have turned for you. Appel has given you his name, so that if Dartigues, taking things at their worst, were to have flung at him all the insults Bertier-Massol has promised him, you, at any rate, would be sheltered from any stain. . . .'

'But my father would be dishonoured! And his honour is my own!'

'Mere words and formulæ!' exclaimed Des Barres.

'Here you are, a young fellow, who imagine you are one with a man you scarcely know, simply because he has said to you in trembling tones, "I am your father!" The honour of that unknown individual becomes his own! Those clever rogues who built up the social principles under which we are living well knew what they were about. Their object was to institute moral as well as material servitude. Freedom nowhere, no more in minds and consciences than in acts! This society is a bagnio in which man is chained down by prejudice and superstition. That is why we wish to change it all, my child. You are well aware it is so, but your hereditary servility springs up afresh like a weed one thinks he has rooted up from the ground. Ah, how hard and painful it is to mount the stream in attempts to reform humanity!'

'My dear master,' replied Pierre gently, 'in speaking and acting as I am now doing, I am only acting as my mother would do. It is she who has indicated the line of action I should take. . . .'

'Ah, I suspected it! She is very brave, even heroic, but it is not heroism we want now. It is common-sense. Are you sure of the sentiments of Mlle. Hermandez?'

'As sure as I am of my own!'

'Is she at all sensitive or romantic?'

'She is the very soul of generosity and self-respect.'

'Do you think her capable of trying to forget you?'

'I do not think she would do that for the world.'

'Even if you were to ask her to do it?'

'What are you thinking of?'

'The possibility of Dartigues beseeching you to

sacrifice yourself in order to save him, and, to do so, liberating Mlle. Hermandez from her promise.'

'So that she may marry Claude Brun? She could never be induced to accept the hand of that man. She despises him too much.'

'Very good.'

'Nor would my father be willing to sacrifice me in favour of his own security.'

So violent an expression of irony appeared in Des Barres' eyes that Pierre could not bear it, so he said:

'I know that what I say is the truth. My father has not deceived me. He may formerly have acted selfishly, but now . . .'

'What you say is quite true. Dartigues' sentiments may have changed with the different position in which he now finds himself. A man who has made his fortune neither thinks nor acts like a poor wretch without anything at all. The struggle for life creates cannibals, but once victory has come the appetite calms down. One no longer devours one's enemies; a man contents himself with spoiling them. And after enriching one's self with their spoils, one is often quite disposed to perform deeds of charity. Ah! human ignominy is profound, but not illogical. In truth, I quite believe your father would at this moment act like a delicate and sensitive millionaire. Well, then, profit by his delicacy and sensitiveness. But the other, this Claude Brun, will act like a mad bull. Once a man has passed the age of forty passion becomes terrible. Such a man would destroy the whole of humanity, if by so doing he could succeed in his plans. . . . This one will be without pity.'

'I will deal with him if only he will give me an opportunity.'

Des Barres regarded complaisantly the young man's lofty stature and his resolute air.

'Yes, I know you are quite disposed to roll up your sleeves and knock down your rival. All the same, you must be on your guard. Personal courage has nothing to do with this affair. If you attack Claude Brun you may find in him your master. This adventurer is bound to be a man of considerable *sang-froid*, and the handsomest young fellow in the world would run a mortal risk before a steady hand and the barrel of a pistol.'

'That will not stand in my way.'

'I know, but that does not reassure me. I intend to keep my eyes open. Meanwhile, the situation has become clearer. The Maillane election is being used as a pretext by which Claude Brun will try to obtain Mlle. Hermandez by fair means or foul. On the one hand, he is working in my favour, though I do not at all like being helped in this manner; on the other hand, he is acting against you, which in itself would suffice to induce me to overthrow his plans. Accordingly I will set about it at once. . . . Return home, and do nothing till you hear from me. . . . To-day is Wednesday, accordingly the Chambre does not meet, and we have time to take all necessary measures.'

Slightly relieved by such encouragement, Pierre took leave of Des Barres, and hastened in the direction of the Champs Élysées, where he was to meet Bella.

On leaving Dartigues Claude had assisted at the departure of Mlle. Hermandez for her drive in the Bois. The black pony was impatiently stamping his

feet, and Mlle. Auger mounted the tilbury with prudent slowness. Dartigues' ally humbly bowed to the young girl, who gravely returned his salute. Not a single sign of a quiver passed over her charming countenance; her whole attitude expressed the most complete indifference. Brun had no existence so far as she was concerned. Seeing himself so thoroughly despised, he trembled with rage. Over in the colonies he had seen the beautiful creoles give such a look at the mixed breeds, the sons of slaves. He thought: 'This proud, disdainful creature shall belong to me. I will tame her!'

Claude ordered his driver to follow the tilbury, and himself mounted the Champs Élysées on foot, in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe. He reflected on what had happened. Dartigues' dejection, although anticipated, had surprised him. He could not understand the sudden collapse of the other's energy. The man he had known as cynical and ferocious was suddenly revealed before him as capable of affection and devotion. The father was anxious to shield the son. And yet, a few weeks earlier, he had made overtures to this son, thinking to make him contribute to the success of his candidature. Now, instead of making use of him to paralyze his opponent, he was sacrificing his hopes, his very position even, to a tardy and absurd sentimentality.

This was a cruel surprise for Claude Brun. Still, he was determined not to be the dupe of Dartigues' paternal fancies. If the latter were anxious to end his days as a penitent, he himself had no intention of helping him to do so. Betrayed by Dartigues, from whom he had hoped to obtain Bella (for how could he

have supposed he would not have favoured his suit?), he was now forced to find some combination or other to overcome the resistance of Mlle. Hermandez. Here the situation was quite definite; there was no ground for hesitation. So long as Pierre and Bella were of one mind, Claude had nothing whatever to hope for. He could expect nothing except from some discomfiture on the part of the young girl, and this discomfiture could be caused by nothing else than a formal renunciation made by Pierre to the plans they had formed amid the beautiful surroundings of Maillane.

Once sure of his position, Claude instinctively felt that Appel or Francine alone would have sufficient influence over Pierre to persuade him to abandon everything regarding Dartigues. Their interest — he always thought first of interest — would impel them to overcome Dartigues' recently acquired influence. Their jealous love for the child must induce them to try to bring him back to their side. They must doubtless be already alarmed at the moral modifications the new surroundings into which Pierre had been introduced would bring in the sentiments and even the opinions of the young man. Once won over by Dartigues, he would be lost to them. Accordingly, however biassed they might be with regard to Claude, they must be on his side in this matter.

That was all he expected of them. The very manner in which their intervention would be effected was quite indifferent to him; the only thing he cared for was that it should take place. It was this very means of bringing it to pass that he was pondering over as, with downcast head, he proceeded along the Avenue

Hoche. Should he appeal to Appel or to Francine? Which of the two would receive him the less unfavourably? He distrusted the Professor's clairvoyant logic, for would not Appel, accustomed as he was to read the most secret thoughts of the human brain, immediately divine his plan? But even if he did, what mattered it? The situation remained unchanged. Appel might think whatever he liked concerning himself, the facts were unaltered.

He imagined Francine would be the more easy of the two to convince. Here, however, arose the difficulty of obtaining her consent to receive him. On hearing his name announced, she would certainly refuse to speak to him, so that he would be obliged to enter her presence without his incognito being discovered. Then, with sufficient leisure allowed to explain matters, he would find some way out of the difficulty. He stopped, signed to his coachman to draw near, and ordered him to drive to the Rue du Luxembourg.

Francine was on the point of putting on her hat to go to the clinic, as was her custom, when the valet informed her that a gentleman wished to speak to her.

'Who is the gentleman? Did he give his card? Do you know him?'

'No, madame; he said you would be certain to receive him once you knew that his business was important, and had reference to M. Pierre. . . .'

Francine threw down her hat.

'Show him into the small salon; I will follow in a moment.'

Claude Brun had immediately gained his first

object. After waiting a minute, he saw Mme. Appel appear. At first a feeling of surprise came over him at finding himself in the presence of a woman of quite venerable aspect, gray-haired, and dressed in black. In the freshness of her complexion, however, and the frankness of her look, he recognised with a greater trouble than he would have wished the woman he had loved in former days. She looked attentively at him, but he had taken the precaution to stand with his back to the window, so that his face remained in the shade. Not recognising him, she said in tones of anxious haste :

' You have given me to understand, sir, that you wish to speak to me regarding my son. . . .'

He replied :

' Yes, madame.'

A quiver ran through her frame at these words uttered by the visitor. Taking a few steps in the direction of the fireplace, she now found herself in a position to distinguish the visitor's features. As though anxious to hear once more the voice which revealed an echo in her own thoughts, she asked :

' What is the matter ?'

' I wish to speak of the relations between your son and M. Dartigues. . . .'

This time there was no further cause for doubt. A sudden blush came over her forehead as she exclaimed :

' Claude Brun !'

He bowed, and said :

' Yes, Claude Brun.'

Regaining possession of herself, she asked :

' What is your business here ?'

' I wish to do you a service.'

She said bitterly :

'What a change, indeed !'

'The fact is, everything has changed in twenty years,' he said. 'This step I have taken was absolutely necessary. Were it not so, I would have spared you . . .'

With a gesture of impatience, she interrupted him.

'Please come to the point. What has happened to my son ?'

'The very worst thing that could have happened. Dartigues, with the object of attaching Pierre to himself and detaching him from you, has favoured this young man's love for Mlle. Hermandez, his step-daughter. . . . You must already have noticed what trouble has been caused in your son's life by this skilful manœuvre. Prepare yourself for a real mishap unless these plans are modified.'

'I do not understand you,' said Francine. 'Explain yourself more clearly. . . .'

'Mlle. Hermandez is loved by a man who is firmly determined that she shall not marry Dartigues' son.'

'But why have you come to me ? What can I do ?'

'You can use your influence over Pierre to dissuade him from thinking of Mlle. Hermandez.'

'Has a mother sufficient influence over her son to prevent him from loving ?'

'Has she sufficient influence to prevent this son allowing his father to suffer dishonour ?'

'In what way ?'

'The man I speak of holds Dartigues at his mercy ; he can ruin him by a single word. If he wishes, all Dartigues' past life, far more terrible than that part of it you are acquainted with, will be unveiled. The

name borne by your son will be uttered and repeated on every hand as that of a villain. You see the situation is a perfectly simple one. Either your son renounces all hope of marrying Mlle. Hermandez, and informs her of this, or Dartigues will be sacrificed. There is no pity to expect at the hands of the one who formulated this dilemma. He loves Mlle. Hermandez, and is determined to marry her. If not, the father shall be plunged into the mire of infamy under the son's very eyes.'

Carried away by passion, Claude's voice became more and more excited. The feeling of anger which had been brewing in him burst forth; his rancour and jealousy were now unmasked, and manifested by the threatening language he used. Francine was not deceived by him, but, looking steadily at him, she said:

'And this man is yourself?'

He quivered, passed his hand over his forehead, moist with perspiration, and in a dull voice replied:

'Yes, this man is myself. I may say so quite freely, for I have nothing to fear.'

'And it is your former partner and companion you are treating in this way?'

'I am repaying him what he has given me—evil for evil. Am I not right in doing so?'

With a scornful gesture, she replied:

'Do not ask me to decide between the wrongs you have both done.'

'Oh! You have the right to speak so. I expected nothing from your benevolence, though I did rely on your reason. Do you understand that if your son is won over by Dartigues he goes straight to his ruin?

You must have seen what a rapid moral degradation has recently come over him. Already he has begun to abandon you; he has been on the point of suspecting you of acting unworthily towards his father. Take care of the influence this corrupter is capable of exercising over the young man. Numerous are his methods of seduction, some of which he has already employed with rare skill. It is so easy for him to appear amiable; you know with what facility he apes perfect cordiality and frankness. If you do not keep your son away from him he will take him from you, and effect a mighty change in his nature which, from being honest and pure, he will make so selfish and crafty that you will turn away from him in horror and dismay!'

'Ah, wretch! you are just the same as you ever were!' exclaimed Francine. 'After contributing so largely to the ruin of the father, you now take delight in explaining to me the possible ruin of the son. What secret joy you must feel in torturing me! And yet I have nothing more in common with Dartigues! Why have you come here to speak to me of him? What matters it to me whatever may befall him? Have I not paid dearly enough the right to trouble no more about him? Dishonoured? Is he not quite as much dishonoured in my eyes as he could possibly be? I no longer know this man; I have nothing further in common with him!'

'Yes, you have your son. It is there you are still vulnerable. You have thrown aside everything attaching you to Dartigues, and have become Mme. Appel. But although you have changed your name and condition, you have not been able to change

your heart. And this heart of yours is devoted to Pierre, whom Dartigues is now doing his utmost to remove from you. On recovering his son, a feeling of affection has now come over him, and, wonderful to relate, this fierce egoist, who never loved anything but success, because in success it was his own self he haughtily worshipped, has become quite tender-hearted, and really loves this young man—in fact, he is perfectly devoted to him. Very soon he will be unable to do without him. Once Pierre is married to his step-daughter, you will be unable to regain him. It is this marriage which must be prevented. It is here, please remember, that your interests are in accord with mine.'

Francine gave a gesture of indignant protest.

'Very good!' continued Claude. 'Do not trouble about words; think only of the facts of the case. You lose Pierre, and I lose Bella. Do not ask yourself whether or not it is right that your son should gradually detach himself from you; think only of the fact that, once married to Mlle. Hermandez he escapes you altogether, unless my intervention renders all agreement impossible between Dartigues and your son. Even then, so far as yourself and Pierre are concerned, the remedy will doubtless become worse than the evil. I told you I was ready to do anything to win Bella. Unless you place an insurmountable obstacle between Bella and Pierre, I will undertake to separate them. But then, at what cost? Listen: I will publish every corrupt action, every embezzlement and fraud, Dartigues has ever committed, proofs of which are in my possession. . . .'

'Doubtless because you have had your share in them!'

Claude Brun did not even take the trouble to reply.

'I will publish them in political circles, and such a scandal will ensue that it would have been better for your son never to have been born rather than bear the name of his father.'

'His name is now Appel.'

'But he knows whose son he is. He shall learn the nature of the man whose blood he has in his veins, and what he has done, and will hide his face in shame at the knowledge. The more haughty and delicate he is, the more keenly will he suffer. Such a burden on one's heart at the beginning of life means disenchantment and grief right to the end. Do you wish him to owe such a fate to you?'

'What can I do?'

'Your duty. Put him on his guard. Give him the choice between the sacrifice of a nascent love and the abandoning of his father. Show him what a heroic duty he will be fulfilling in giving Dartigues perfect security. If he will renounce all thought of Bella, the whole position will at once be changed: his father's situation will be as firm and brilliant as ever. He will be elected deputy for Maillane, and his loftiest ambitions will be gained. Besides, instead of having to suffer, Pierre will congratulate himself, for he will have been the cause of all these triumphs.'

'Whatever happens, he will suffer.'

'Less if he sacrifices himself in a noble cause than if he were to basely abandon his father.'

'Still he will suffer! And what has he done to deserve it? Is it right that the innocent should always pay for the guilty?'

She wrung her hands in despair, for she knew with

whom she had to deal, and that she might expect neither pity nor weakness from the one who proposed this bargain. In her trouble, what resolution could she come to? Claude saw how agitated she was, and that she had reached such a state as to warrant him in expecting her to capitulate shortly. He continued with the utmost insistence:

'Come! Do not hesitate! Of what importance are the love affairs of these two children compared with the peace of mind of all those who are dear to you? . . . Will you promise me you will speak to your son? I know you will keep a promise. I am also aware that if he gives you his word to give up all thoughts of Bella he will never see her again. He is a man of honour. . . . As for her, she is a mere child; she will forget.'

At this point a gentle but firm voice replied:

'Never!'

Stupefied, Claude Brun saw standing side by side on the threshold of the drawing-room Pierre and Bella, the very two he had been disposing of so readily. They advanced towards Mme. Appel as though unaware of the presence of a stranger, and the young man said calmly:

'Mother, here is Mlle. Hermandez, who insisted on calling to see you. Of course, I knew she would be well received. All the same, I had no suspicion that her presence here would be so opportune.'

He looked at Claude Brun without the slightest sign of anger. The two women were locked in one another's arms. Bella was the first to free herself from the embrace, and, taking a step forward, she placed herself in front of Dartigues' ally, who stood

there motionless, as though he had been turned into stone.

'Monsieur, you have been making statements about me which I consider hazardous to a singular degree. It is not in my nature to forget those I love, nor even those, I may add, whom I detest. I cannot well understand why you persecute me so obstinately, for I have taken no pains to conceal from you the fact that your advances were anything but pleasing to me. In a word, what is it you are dreaming of? Do you wish to force me to accept you? The height of folly! A girl such as I am listens to her own heart alone; she has not been born to be the servant of a man like you. Were we in my own country, I should only have a single word to say, for there are enough of my father's lieutenants left to give you the thrashing your impudence deserves. However, as we are in your country, I myself will undertake to bring you to your senses. Never—understand me—never will the daughter of General Hermandez give her hand to a petty trader such as you are. It would be too great a fall! I have been told, and what little I have heard from you personally confirms the fact, that you have been uttering threats against my friends and relatives—against M. Dartigues, my step-father, and M. Pierre Appel, my fiancé. Listen still further: whatever insults you utter against M. Dartigues, whatever harm you do to M. Pierre Appel, you will never succeed in degrading the former to your own level, or in causing the latter to be loved the less by me. Do you understand that? And now, if you have nothing further to say, Mme. Appel does not seem disposed to detain you, and M. Pierre and myself find no pleasure in your

company. Accordingly, my opinion is that it would be best for us all if you would retire. Adieu, M. Claude Brun. Do not forget that, no matter in what part of the world, one does not impose one's will on a woman: one only obtains her hand when she is willing to give it.'

Claude, pale with rage, turned towards Pierre, hoping that a word, or even a look, would give him an opportunity to avenge himself on the young man for the outrage Bella had poured upon him. He saw Pierre standing there, stern but sad; neither a smile of triumph nor a look of scorn appeared on his face. Sighing deeply, he bowed to Mme. Appel, and said:

'Matters are not likely to be settled in this way. I hope you will remember what I have said, madame. The course of events cannot be modified by mere words. Mademoiselle has spoken to some effect, but facts, too, are not without an eloquence of their own, and in all likelihood they will have the last word.'

'We shall see!' replied Mlle. Hermandez.

As he was leaving the room, Dartigues' evil genius glanced once more at Francine and the two young people. With a shake of the head and a threatening gesture of the arm, he said:

'I will go. . . . Perhaps, when it is too late, you will bitterly regret having despised my advice. . . . This evening everything will be decided.'

At these words Bella gave a mocking laugh.

'Be kind enough to spare us your prophecies. . . . Though you imagine yourself imposing, you succeed only in being ridiculous. Don't deceive yourself as to the effect you produce, for it is really deplorable.

I shall never be able to forget this attitude of a melodramatic tyrant you have tried to assume.'

Claude stayed to hear no more. With quiet, gliding steps, he reached the door; the two women and Pierre were almost astonished to find that he had disappeared from their midst. All the same, he had left behind an atmosphere of trouble and uneasiness. The presence of Mlle. Hermandez, which ought to have occasioned Mme. Appel so much joyful surprise, merely increased the feeling of sadness and gloom which had come over her. She did not regard Claude Brun's threats as of no consequence, for she had seen him at work, and knew what he was capable of. To her he was not, as he was to the young girl, an odious and grotesque greybeard, who was determined to force his love on her.

His age did not appear to her as a subject for laughter, but rather as something to be dreaded. He would certainly make an attempt to have all the insults he had just swallowed in the presence of his rival, dearly paid for. It was this certainty of the danger incurred by her son that filled the mother's heart with anguish. And yet she could not refrain from smiling at this frank and charming girl, who spoke to her with every manifestation of respect and tenderness. She saw Pierre, already forgetting his troubles, and careless of danger, beaming with joy in the presence of the one he loved. With a sigh, Francine opened her arms to the beautiful girl who called her mother, and for an hour the mother's tortured soul was nursed by the illusion of happiness.

She listened to Bella, who poured out her plans for the future. Everything in the girl's chaste heart was

so simple and innocent that Francine, in spite of herself, began to entertain a feeling of hope. Why should she not be compensated for all her troubles? Might not fate, after all, be merciful to her? Had not this newly-found daughter, whose spontaneity and innocent pride rendered her so different from all the young girls she had been accustomed to meet, been reserved as a precious triumph to console her for her past troubles?

Claude Brun had left the room, his heart filled with the gall of anger. The tranquil disdain of Bella had completely overthrown all his plans. Certainly, he did not yet consider himself as beaten, though he acknowledged to himself that his chances of success had considerably diminished. Not for a single moment did he think of giving up the struggle. Neither his shameful treachery towards Dartigues nor his vile persecution of Bella caused him to hesitate an instant in the execution of his plans. His gloomy soul knew neither doubt nor scruple. He had not been a scoundrel for the past twenty years merely to withdraw now before an act of infamy greater than any he had ever committed.

All the same, he was astonished at the gentleness of disposition Dartigues had given proof of. Incapable of understanding the tardy sentiments to which his partner was yielding, he regarded as a weakening of character what was really an awakening of conscience. Above all, Claude hated Pierre. As he returned home through the labyrinth of streets in the Halles Quarter, he asked himself whether he loved Bella as much as he detested her fiancé. He accused the latter of being the cause of all the trouble that had befallen the Dar-

tigues household, and yet he remembered, not without humiliation, that it was he himself who had given his friend the fatal advice to make overtures to his son. Still, even though he had not furnished the opportunity for a meeting between father and son, would it not fatally have taken place all the same ?

Once back again in France, could Dartigues have helped being a prey to his former associations ? Would he not, from sheer curiosity, have tried to discover what kind of a man this Pierre he had left, almost before he could speak, had now become ? So that what had happened was as inevitable as a problem in mathematics. Circumstances might have varied, but the results would have been produced all the same. Dartigues, finding his son grown into a handsome, tall young man, would have interested himself in him, and have tried to win him over to his side. The very best means he could adopt for this purpose was that which had offered itself at Maillane : the meeting of Pierre and Bella.

As soon as the young couple were brought into one another's presence, mutual love was bound to be the result, and that all the more certainly as opposition and difficulty would be met with. Fate was accordingly responsible for everything ; the implacable logic of destiny had traced out the path of events. There remained only the conclusion, and it was here that Claude was determined to intervene. His own combination still seemed to him a good one. The advantage it offered was that it was directed against all who were opposed to him. It was like an enormous mine, the explosion of which would inevitably destroy the enemy's strongholds. Everybody would be struck

—Dartigues and Pierre, Mlle. Hermandez and Bella, Francine and Appel.

From his hiding-place he would produce a cataclysm which would avenge him on all who opposed his will. He resembled one of those monsters who clandestinely poison a spring of water, and afterwards run off with a feeling of fierce joy at the thought of the havoc and destruction they are about to occasion. An ugly look came over his face as he thought of all the evil he intended to cause, and he clasped together his hands tightly, as though he had them on the throats of his victims. And yet, a solitary fear had gained possession of him. Accomplished as he was in treachery, he readily suspected that he might himself be deceived after all. He now had doubts as to the sincerity of Bertier-Massol.

It had been his first intention to choose one of Des Barres' co-religionists, an enemy of the Ministry, and a journalist redoubtable for both audacity and violence, to put his plan into operation. The article published in the *Pavé* had produced the effect he had aimed at. Had he sufficient confidence in Bertier-Massol to deliver up to him the accusing documents? It was a terrible indictment, calculated to compromise the Ministry, and provoke a scandal in which all the corruption of the parliamentary régime would once more appear in all its loathsome ugliness.

Still, ought the task of making the breach in the Republican fortress to be entrusted to a deputy of the Extreme Left? What guarantee was there that Bertier, at the last moment, would not yield to other considerations, and shrink before the enormity of the deed? Already Claude had begun to entertain sus-

picions, from a few words which had escaped Dartigues. There came into his mind the idea of completely changing his tactics, and setting in action one of the most uncompromising opponents of the actual state of things. Would not a deputy of the Right, a man beyond suspicion, of incorruptible honour, an old soldier of the Vendée, be more readily countenanced in an attack against Republican corruption? The Marquis de Coutras, an extremely wealthy and respected representative of the Royalist party, a popular orator in Catholic clubs, apostle of Christian Socialism, a kind of Crusader lost in a century of unbelieving scepticism, appeared to him the best instrument he could have chosen to ruin Dartigues.

He suddenly stopped his coachman, and ordered him to drive to the Palais Bourbon. He wished to ask for the address of the Royalist deputy, and possibly, in case the Marquis were assisting at some committee meeting or other, to obtain an interview. At the same time, he proposed to inform Bertier-Massol that he had given up his plan. In that way, if Bertier was in collusion with Des Barres, his opponents would be reassured, and any attempt they might make to hinder his movements would be prevented. The Marquis was not at the Chambre. His address was given in the Rue Saint-Dominique, whither Claude immediately drove.

On passing the large, solemn-looking entrance-door, which led into a courtyard where two grooms were engaged in washing a brougham, he found himself in front of a flight of six steps, leading to a vast vestibule, behind the glass door of which stood a footman. Claude, intimidated in spite of his audacity, mounted

the steps, entered the hall, and asked the lackey if he could see the Marquis de Coutras.

'To-day M. le Marquis receives his electors. If you will kindly give me your card or tell me your name . . .'

Claude was too cautious to leave behind him any traces of his visit. A card may be seen or lost; he preferred to give his name. The valet pressed a small knob, and immediately there appeared from behind a curtain an usher, dressed in black, with silk stockings and the air of a beadle. The valet whispered in the usher's ear Claude's name, whereupon the solemn-looking individual said:

'Will you come this way, monsieur.'

Claude passed through a long flagged passage, whose walls were ornamented with magnificent pictures representing views of Venice by Canaletto and trophies of ancient arms of inestimable value. Through an open door Claude entered a small waiting-room, the walls of which were hung with Flanders tapestry, whilst around the room were stained windows belonging to the sixteenth century. The usher disappeared.

A feeling of anxiety came over Claude as he found himself alone in this stately mansion, awaiting the moment when he was to crown the infamous conduct he had in mind. Amid such scenes of nobility and splendour the baseness of his own conduct was only the more pronounced. He remained there in a state of reverie for about a quarter of an hour, lulled by the tic-tac of a Louis XIII. timepiece of ebony and inlaid tinwork. Looking out through the windows into the large garden, he saw a number of wood-pigeons strutting about the lawn and standing on

the brink of a marble fountain. The lilacs were already in blossom, and the grass, carefully attended to by the gardeners, appeared wonderfully fresh and green. A deep silence brooded over this reposeful spot. Finally Claude heard a slight footfall. He turned round, and saw advancing towards him a man of average height, with smiling face, a Henri IV. beard, keen, piercing eyes, and decidedly military gait.

'You wish to speak to me, sir?' said the Marquis with the utmost affability. 'Something concerning yourself personally? . . .'

Claude replied in a firm voice:

'I have some very important political information to give you, M. le Marquis.'

'Will you kindly step this way,' said the Marquis, indicating the door by which he himself had just entered the room.

Claude entered a large study, the roof of which was ornamented with gilded compartments, whilst the walls were covered with Cordova leather. The room was furnished with ebony cupboards of superb Italian workmanship, a Renaissance table and chairs of the same kind. Claude, astonished, stood near the desk, whilst the Marquis leaned against the mantel-piece beneath which glowered a few half-burnt embers.

'Well, monsieur?' said the deputy.

'M. le Marquis, I can offer you the means of dealing a mortal blow against the Government. . . .'

'Ah! Ah!' exclaimed the Marquis. 'I see you go straight to the point, at any rate. . . .'

Adjusting an eyeglass, he looked with interest at his visitor, and added coldly:

'And how much do you want for your information?'

'Nothing,' replied Claude calmly. 'This is not a bargain I propose; it is a matter of morality and conscience.'

'Ah!' repeated the Marquis, 'and I suppose you represent morality?'

'Yes, M. le Marquis, as you yourself represent conscience.'

A short silence followed. M. de Coutras dropped his eye glass.

'Why have you applied to me?'

'Because your reputation for honour is above discussion, M. le Marquis, and no one would dream of doubting as to the authenticity of a fact once you advanced it.'

'Are you a Royalist in political opinion?'

'No, M. le Marquis; had I time to dabble in politics, I should be a Republican. . . .'

'So that you are quite free from all party interest? Then what is the motive of your action in this case?'

'M. le Marquis, the persons whose exactions I am about to denounce to you have done me an irreparable wrong. However, I am taking this step on account of the public wrong they have done.'

'What are the facts?'

'Fraud and embezzlement in the Gabès affair with the collusion of certain Government agents.'

'The deuce!' exclaimed M. de Coutras, leaving the mantelpiece and returning to his desk.

Taking a seat by the side of Claude, he assumed an attentive air, and said:

'Commence your story, my dear sir; I will give you my entire attention.'

CHAPTER XII

RÉMANÇON had just left his bedroom, and, attired in his dressing-gown as old and ugly as ever, was reading the morning's papers in his drawing-room, the while sipping a cup of tea, when the valet entered, and said, in startled tones :

'Mlle. de Tresmes wishes to speak to you, monsieur. . . .'

'Amandine ! At this hour ?' asked the financier.

'That is what I said, but she assured me that she had news of importance, and . . .'

'Show her in at once.'

Rémançon passed his hand through his scanty and straggling hairs, and twisting his moustache, he asked himself :

'What the deuce can this mean ?'

Amandine rushed into the room.

'Good-morning, Rémançon. You did not expect me at this time of the day, did you ? However, nothing can stop me when the interests of a friend of mine are at stake. . . . Drink that warm water of yours. . . . Don't let me disturb you. . . .'

'I have just finished. . . . Tell me what is the matter.'

'Well, last night, after spending the evening at the Olympia with a few friends, we went to supper,

and during the meal mention was made of an affair which is about to take place to-day at the Chambre of such a nature as to seriously embarrass the Cabinet.'

'Ah!'

'You know I am quite indifferent as to what happens to the Cabinet! But I listened all the same. One never knows what one may hear. I discovered that the old Marquis de Coutras, the orator of the Royalist party, is about to question the Minister, with reference to the Budget of Public Works, concerning the Gabès affair. . . .'

'The Gabès affair?'

'You may imagine how eagerly I swallowed everything they said, knowing as I did that both yourself and Dartigues were implicated in it. . . . The viscounts and barons made huge sport of the affair, saying to one another that this will be a second edition of the Panama scandal!'

'Oh! And it is M. de Coutras who is to speak?'

'This very day.'

Rémançon sprang to his feet, and, violently ringing the bell, exclaimed:

'Not a moment to lose! . . . Bernard, in twenty minutes I must be off!'

'Well, good-bye,' said Amandine; 'I have told you all you needed to know.'

At that very moment Des Barres sat smoking a pipe in his office, listening to Bréloquier, who had brought him the same news regarding the intentions of the Royalist orator. The announcement of the question which was to be asked of the Minister had been brought to the offices of the *Pavé* by the parliamentary journalist, who had heard it from one of

the Cabinet attachés. With his usual politeness, the old nobleman gave notice to his opponent of the blow he was preparing to deal him, so that he might be acquainted with the position. Bertier-Massol had immediately exclaimed :

'This is my affair ! However can this old Vendéan Royalist have been entrusted with it ?'

Bréloquier had made up his mind to inform Des Barres on whatever concerned Dartigues, for he knew that such news would interest him from a double point of view—on account of his candidature and on account of the Appels. There they sat in the study talking the matter over.

'In a word, it is Claude Brun who has changed his musket from one shoulder to the other. All the same, he is making it impossible for us to avert the blow. . . . It was possible to become master of the position with Bertier-Massol, but with the Marquis de Coutras it is quite a different matter.'

'Yes, Claude Brun has displayed remarkable sagacity in choosing the only man who will be absolutely uncompromising from a political point of view, and who will also be difficult to influence from the moral one as well.'

'Without mentioning the fact that the importance of the incident will be singularly increased by reason of the high standing of the Marquis. Take my word for it, the great Christian orator is quite a different man from Bertier-Massol. His influence and talent far exceed that of our friend. . . . I have broken lances with him under memorable circumstances.'

'At the Labour Congress ? . . .'

'Yes, he had the audacity to enter into a debate

with me at a Socialist meeting at Lens, in the very heart of the mining district. . . . The sincerity of his convictions, and the philanthropy so clearly manifested in the remarks he made, impressed those rough, uncultured miners to such an extent that they applauded him to the echo, and accompanied him to his carriage in the street with marks of respect they had never been known to show to anyone else, Guesde and myself excepted. . . . They said to one another: "There's a fine man for you! If all the clerical party were of the same type, we might perhaps come to an understanding." My dear fellow, Christian Socialism had shaken their faith. . . . If there were a dozen propagandists like the Marquis de Coutras among the working classes, collectivism would be dead in a couple of years! All the women would be won over, and once they enter a movement . . .'

'But he is quite alone; around him are none but the fossils of the old parties. We have nothing to fear except so far as this matter is concerned. . . . What do you intend to do?'

'Upon my word, I have not the slightest idea. . . . What can I do?'

'Place Appel and Pierre on their guard. . . . And what then? They will be aware of the danger threatening them, but that will not enable us to ward off the blow about to fall. . . . In the first place, I shall telephone to Appel.'

As he spoke he began to tap away at the apparatus.

'Whatever happens,' said Bréloquier, 'Dartigues will not be elected for Maillane. . . . And that is the most important thing for us.'

'Hello! hello!' exclaimed Des Barres. 'Yes, Des

Barres. . . . Just tell Pierre to come and speak to me. . . . I have something to say to him. . . . Bad news. . . . Too long to relate by telephone. . . . Good-day. . . .'

Turning to Bréloquier, he said :

'This will economize my resources, though anyhow I was determined to defeat this adventurer. After all, once he is flung into the water, there is nothing to prove that he will not try to get out. Greater scoundrels than he is have been elected.'

'After the blow the deputy of Maillane is preparing to give him he will be deprived of his strongest props. . . . The Government, with its usual cowardice, will leave him in the lurch. . . .'

'But the Marquis de Coutras will have to speak. . . .'

'Who will try to stop him ?'

'Perhaps I shall.'

Bréloquier opened his eyes in astonishment.

'What ! You would prevent the Marquis de Coutras from helping you in the most decisive manner ?'

'Yes, I may prevent, or at any rate try to prevent, the Marquis from crushing my opponent. . . . For the simple reason, my good Bréloquier, that the fall of Dartigues may mean also the fall of Pierre, whom I love as though he were my own son.'

'Are you quite sure of what you say ? Take care you do not become the dupe of your own tender heart and vivid imagination !'

'Bréloquier, my dear friend, you astonish me. All your life you yourself have been the dupe of nothing else !'

'And you see what success I have had ! If you are thinking of imitating me, take warning ! What !

would you, Des Barres, run the risk of being as stupid as this old Bréloquier you see before you, who has spoiled everything he ever undertook? Do not act as I have done! Be practical; don't let yourself be caught by the snare of your own sentiments. If our young friend Pierre is bespattered by the mud into which this bourgeois father of his will soon be thrown, very well, let him wash himself clean. Don't imagine he will die of it. As for yourself, if Dartigues, through your disinterestedness, defeats you at Maillane, you will indeed have made progress, and your party as well! The deuce! Think that you belong to your friends, not to yourself!'

'Well, my dearest friends are the Appels, as they have proved more than a score of times. I shall never forget their kindness to me.'

'Ah, you wish to be at the head of a party, and yet do not know what it is to be ungrateful!'

At this point Rose, the old servant, broke into the conversation in her usual grumbling manner, as she announced Pierre.

'Here is M. Pierre. If you are busy you will have to stop work now.'

'What business is that of yours, please?' said Des Barres quietly to the servant. 'Go to your kitchen to see if I am there.'

'Of course you are not there—luckily for the food! What a fine state of things there would be if you were there!'

She left the room.

'I always wonder,' remarked Bréloquier, 'how you can possibly keep such an intolerable old vixen in the house.'

'My dear friend, she is very useful indeed to me. It is a continual lesson in patience. Besides, she is perfectly trustworthy, never reads a paper, and does not repeat what she hears. All this is more than is needed to render her indispensable. At bottom she would die for me.'

Turning to Pierre, he said in a changed tone of voice:

'We are indeed in a fix now. Claude Brun's interpreter is no longer Bertier-Massol; it is the Marquis de Coutras. . . .'

'Then all is lost!' exclaimed the young man in tones of anguish.

'He is to speak this morning on the Budget discussion. . . . I have sent for you to talk over the matter together. What do you want me to do?'

'What can you do?'

'I can request the Marquis de Coutras not to introduce the inquiry.'

'Would you risk such a step?'

'Yes, for Appel and yourself.'

'But doing so would expose you to all kinds of slanderous commentaries. . . . Who knows that you might escape being compromised?'

'I could not be; that is the privilege of a life of open disinterestedness. Who would dare to accuse me?'

'Those whose interest it would be to do so.'

'Who?'

Pierre made no reply. With anguished countenance he looked at Des Barres, and the old Socialist saw that the unhappy young man suspected his own father. In those troubled eyes he read: 'Take care; if you sacrifice yourself for me, he is capable of taking an unfair advantage. When, through consideration for

me, you have freed him from the present danger, he will turn upon you furiously instead of thanking and blessing you. He is devoured with ambition; he thinks of nothing else! I cannot reply for him. He betrayed my mother; he has betrayed me, and he will betray you!'

Des Barres said slowly:

'My dear child, you and your mother and Appel I love more than all else in the world. If you ask me to intercede with the Marquis de Coutras in favour of your father, I will do it. . . .'

Pierre turned pale. His hands began to tremble. With a choking voice he said:

'It would rescue him from the depths of infamy. . . . But perhaps . . .'

'Well?'

'. . . Perhaps you would be sacrificing yourself.'

'Would you like me to do so?' asked Des Barres, whose eyes were moist with unshed tears.

'Ah!' groaned Pierre in anguish; 'will you force me to reply?'

The old Socialist held out his arms to his pupil, and said:

'No, I will reply for you. Listen: I do not want your mother or yourself to suffer any longer. Your peace of mind above all other considerations!'

Pierre flung himself passionately into Des Barres' arms.

'Ah, you have saved me from despair!'

'No, no,' said Des Barres gravely; 'it is not I, but rather Appel. He is my friend, and is now protecting you against despair and grief, just as in bygone days he defended your mother against sorrow and poverty.

You have had two fathers in your life, my child—the one gave you your body, the other your soul. Compare the one with the other, judge of the work of each of them, and hesitate no longer, as you have been doing, as to which of the two it is your duty to love.'

'Ah, a whole lifetime of respect and devotion would not give me time to pay the debt I owe you all.'

'Don't trouble about such a thing. . . . Gratitude is a treasure one ought never to attempt to lessen!'

'Oh, I have no doubt I shall be able to prove mine to you. . . .'

'In what way?'

'You shall see!'

'Well, as your mind is made up, let us start at once for the Chambre. We have not a moment to lose. Heaven grant we may succeed in our mission!'

The corridors of the Palais-Bourbon began to fill with a noisy, excited crowd—stately deputies, looking so imposing that one would have imagined the destiny of France lay on their shoulders; journalists, on the look-out for news or information of any kind; inquisitive visitors, bent on assisting at the sitting of Parliament. In spite of the early hour, the light toilets of ladies cast a look of gaiety over the sombre uniformity of masculine dress. Barandet and Rémançon were already present, promenading to and fro, from group to group. Galbran, as soon as he saw them, rushed up to Rémançon, and in cruel, insolent tones asked:

'Anything fresh, Rémançon? To what do we owe the pleasure of seeing you here? Have you any cheques to distribute?'

'No, that happy time is past!' said Rémançon

amiably. 'My dear fellow, you must abandon all hope of meeting with anyone simple-minded enough to think you are worth what you ask for.'

'Then you feel nothing but scorn for the press?'

'Heaven preserve me! I dread the press as I do fire!'

'But will you make no further use of it?'

'Not just at present.'

Shortly afterwards Des Barres, accompanied by Pierre, came into sight. Galbran rushed off to the former, who, at the same moment, under the guidance of an usher, disappeared in a room, the door of which was immediately closed behind him. Pierre, left alone, began to walk slowly along the Galerie de la Paix, when Rémançon accosted him. Through the door leading into the main hall came a confused murmur of voices every time a deputy entered or left the room. The Marquis de Coutras, wearing a tightly-fitting coat adorned with the yellow and green ribbon of the military medal he had won on the battle-field of Loigny, at that moment stepped from the library. The usher who had introduced Des Barres accosted the deputy for Morbihan, and in respectful and deferential tones said:

'There is a visitor in the second office, M. le Marquis. Would you be willing to see him, M. le Marquis?'

'Who is it?'

'M. des Barres.'

The marquis appeared as though he could not believe his own ears.

'Des Barres? And he wishes to see me?'

'Yes, M. le Marquis.'

'Ah! Des Barres! . . . Well, let us see what he wants.'

He passed in front of Pierre and Rémançon, gave a few lordly and ceremonious bows to right and left, and entered the office. Des Barres was on his feet, looking out of the window into the garden of the President of the Chambre. He turned slowly round, and the two political opponents found themselves in one another's presence. They formed perfect incarnations of the two races from which they had sprung. The Marquis, tall and thin, fifty years of age, with gray hair and dark moustache, small feet and slender hands, light and well built, just the kind of man to mount on horseback and put himself at the head of a brilliant cavalry charge; Des Barres, square-shouldered and stoutly built, like the people from whom he had sprung, his dark hair thrust back over his forehead like a lion's mane, with frank and intelligent look, his whole aspect that of a man willing to work slowly and patiently for progress in the future. They bowed to one another as to equals, for they knew their mutual worth. The Marquis pointed to an armchair, and in tones of refined politeness said:

'To what do I owe the pleasure, M. des Barres, of receiving you this morning? Can I be of service to you in any way?'

'Yes, M. le Marquis. . . .'

'Oh!' exclaimed M. de Coutras, with a smile. 'Please do not call me "M. le Marquis." If we give one another titles, I shall be obliged to call you citizen.'

'I will not annoy you for so small a matter,' replied Des Barres, also smiling. 'Well then, monsieur, I have called on you for something you could never anticipate.'

'Would you like me to present you to the Duc d'Orléans ?'

'No, monsieur, no more than you would think of accompanying me to the Public Hall.'

'Indeed, I will go whenever you like! If I can discuss with you the real interests of the working classes . . .'

'Oh, I know you are afraid of nothing; I have seen you at work. It is precisely because you are one of those adversaries one is bound to respect that I have come to inform you of the fact that, unknown to you, you are being made to play a part unworthy of your character.'

'Really? Please explain yourself, M. des Barres. I have no wish to be made the cat's-paw of anyone.'

'Well, monsieur, this morning you are to ask for permission to address the Chambre, during the discussion of the Budget, regarding the frauds and abuses committed by Government servants at the instigation of one of the grantees of the Gabès Canal enterprise. . . .'

'Ah, I understand. . . . So you have come to bring me further proofs against this Dartigues ?'

'No, monsieur; I have come to inform you as to the motives which your informants have obeyed in the matter. . . .'

'Then you want me to spare him ?'

'Yes; in the first instance, I should like you to do so through generosity of heart, and afterwards, when you have heard everything I have to say, your conscience will certainly approve of what your heart dictated.'

'Unless I am mistaken, this Dartigues is your rival in the Maillane district ?'

'You are quite right.'

'Then you run the risk of giving him the victory. . . .'

'True, monsieur. But then my defeat would be a small matter compared with the evil your intervention might occasion.'

The nobleman looked in astonishment at this Socialist as he uttered such noble sentiments. Without the slightest sarcastic intention he said, in accents of deferential emotion :

'We will just examine the situation, M. des Barres, and see if we can come to some arrangement.'

Thereupon, with that eloquent and persuasive simplicity of his, Des Barres sketched out the whole of Claude Brun's intrigue, exposing to the Marquis the hideous extortion of which Dartigues was the object and Pierre the victim. He related Francine's life, the poor mother's troubles, her legitimate pride at having overcome evil fortune, and the tender solicitude of the famous Appel for the child of his intelligence. He gave a picture of Bella, and the ardent love which united the young couple whose happiness was now threatened by the atrocious plotting of Dartigues' insidious partner. The Marquis, motionless and attentive, listened without once interrupting Des Barres' convincing and passionate recital. When it was over the Royalist orator sat there motionless, charmed by the other's tender appeal. Finally he said :

'This Claude Brun is indeed an ugly character. Do you see, M. des Barres, how political life attracts infamy to itself, if it does not produce it spontaneously ? Politics resemble a mighty collective sewer dragging along all kinds of human villainy. Having some evil deed to accomplish, this Claude Brun did

not hesitate; he used politics as ammunition for his war engine, certain beforehand of finding someone to apply the match.'

'And do you intend to be that one, M. de Coutras?'

The Marquis gave a scornful gesture as he replied:

'I do not think so, M. des Barres. Men like myself, who have due respect for tradition, are bound down and tied by scruples of past times. They are bound to act as their fathers would have acted under penalty of being unworthy of these latter. Both the strength and the weakness of our party, M. des Barres, consists in acting out the rules of immutable honour. Nowadays such action is full of disadvantages for us, since we lose, through delicacy, many most advantageous opportunities which our opponents profit by. But, after all, there comes a time when the eyes of the country are opened, and each one is judged according to his deeds. It is this time we are waiting for; meanwhile we pray with the priests, fight with the soldiers, and do homage to our country for all the sacrifices we have made.'

Des Barres bowed as he replied:

'I am not ignorant, monsieur, of the merit of our opponents. My presence here is the proof that I knew to whom I ought to apply.'

'Ah, you flatter me,' said the Marquis, laughing. 'You are quite an opportunist! Listen to me, M. des Barres: at this very moment you and I are both playing into the hands of this vile Government, which treats us all with insult and scorn. We are in a position to deal it a mortal blow, and yet we are concerting together to spare it under pretext of generosity and

delicacy! It will not have much delicacy or generosity in dealing with us! Do you know that it is doing everything it can to bring about my overthrow at the next elections? Let it change the very landmarks on the roads, and the trees in the woods, all of which bear traces of the blood of my ancestors, shed from century to century, from the English wars right to the campaigns of the Vendée, even that would be an easier task than to efface the name of Coutras from the hearts of our peasants. Oh, I defy it to do its worst! Once more I will start forth sowing the good seed—respect for religion, obedience to masters, affection for the flag. I will ask the rich for a portion of their superfluous wealth to make up for the pressing needs of the poor. I will recommend those in humble stations of life to accept its difficulties, and to submit to social necessities. . . . They shall once more understand the language I have always used in their presence. Whatever promises are made them, they will never forget that I never played them false. We shall meet before the tribune, M. Des Barres, and there we will bring our two socialisms into the field! . . .'

The old nobleman smiled courteously, though there was a threatening ring in his words. The descendant of the knightly ancestors he had just evoked, fighting on the territory of Bretagne, from Duguesclin to Charette, reappeared in the passion and sincerity of his words. Des Barres shook his head as he replied:

'M. le Marquis, no one respects your convictions more than I do; but the world is moving along, social evolution is following its course, and the necessities of the future are becoming imperious in

their demand for fulfilment. None of us can escape them. It is not with words, however eloquent they be, that we shall bring the old world into possession of the material and moral progress to which the work of the proletariat has, for ages past, given it a right. With legitimate pride, you have told me of your generations of knights fighting for the glory of their prince and the honour of their name. I can show you generations of workmen who have toiled ever since the beginning of the world for the good of humanity. During your glorious and lucrative wars it is these rough labouring classes which have been crushed and trodden underfoot; it is from them that your grandeur and renown have been obtained. Let them now, in their turn, enter upon a campaign which will give them both independence and security!'

'I do not deny the rights of the people,' replied the nobleman. 'I know satisfaction must be given them. Their needs are well known to me, and their aspirations, once regulated, appear to me just. It is all a question of degree. I should be willing to organize, whilst you intend to overthrow. We should indeed have reached a fine pass if, once the house is in ruins, we should be forced to sleep in the open air. You collectivists never think of the future; you see only your immediate satisfaction. Once you have divided out the wealth of France, what progress will you have made thereby? It will not spring up again like the grass in the fields or the trees in the forests. A time-honoured patrimony, created by the industry, toil, and economy of a hundred generations of human beings, will have been squandered in a moment. Please tell me how it will be restored. You proscribe thrift

and economy, which is nothing else than foresight; you suppress the choice of work, which is the only real satisfaction man possesses. You enclose society in a kind of bagnio, in which individuality would be enchained and independence banished. That is what you give us for progress. My dear friend, it is nothing less than slavery!'

'No, M. le Marquis, it is universal independence. The opponents of the Convention said of it a century ago all you have just said against the collectivists of to-day. And yet that rough reformer was quite right in brutally crushing the old social mould to create the modern organization under which we are now living, and which is itself already breaking to pieces. Everything in the universe becomes transformed, everything progresses. Shall society alone be intangible in its hierarchy, and immutable in its prerogatives? That cannot be, for such a state of things would be contrary to nature and derogatory to reason. We have discovered a new division of social duties and rights. We set forth our programme with the utmost ardour in journals and meetings in language written and spoken. You are quite at liberty to discuss and even improve it, if you can, to perfect our ideas, which are only those of men of sincerity and disinterestedness. The new century will witness wonderful changes in the condition of mankind, M. le Marquis. The people will no longer have any master, and will grow in might and liberty beneath the open heavens.'

M. de Coutras arose, and said softly:

'You forget, M. Des Barres, that in the heavens there will still be God.'

A short silence ensued.

'Ah, M. le Marquis,' said Des Barres, with a bow, 'you are a believer. There is the secret of your strength. Had it not been for religion, we should have won the victory long ago.'

'There will always be religion, M. Des Barres, so long as humanity suffers and wails; that is to say, so long as prayer is necessary. You may succeed in satisfying material appetites, but you will afford no nourishment to the soul, and it is there that you will fail in your mission.'

The two men looked at one another with the utmost respect and benevolence, for each knew that the other was sincere. In this rapid joust the atheist had yielded in nothing to the Christian, whilst the latter felt a keen satisfaction at having once more boldly confessed his faith. M. de Coutras, with his usual tact, felt that the conversation had reached the very limit of mutual concessions. Changing his tone, he said:

'We have just broken a few lances against one another; it has given me great pleasure to do so, for I never meet an opponent of your might without proposing a bout. However, time is flying, and I must return to the meeting. So you want me to give up Dartigues to you?'

'Yes, monsieur, I should be glad if you would.'

'Enough, M. Des Barres; we understand one another. Luckily, an opportunity of attacking the Ministry is not a rare event, and I would not like to grieve your friends for so paltry a matter. . . . As for this file which Claude Brun has placed in my hands, I intend to keep it. He may come and ask me for it if he dare. I hope this incident will not cause you

to lose your seat. . . . It would be a great loss to me, I assure you, if I could not have you in front of me, and we were unable to exchange ideas together.'

Des Barres bowed.

'I expected nothing less, monsieur, from the delicacy and courtesy you have always shown me.'

M. de Coutras smiled, laid his hand on the Socialist's shoulder, and said gaily :

'Come, come! just confess that at bottom you find me rather stupid. You know that at Fontenoy the English were invited to shoot first! And there lay the Guards regiment mown to the ground at the risk of losing the battle! Alas! you see how difficult it is to give up one's habits! And yet you expect the French as a nation suddenly to change theirs? Utopia, my dear friend, Utopia!'

He held out his hand, which Des Barres took and shook with the utmost respect. They parted at the door. Pierre, who was on the look-out, ran up to his master.

'Well?'

'Well! It is all right. Within five minutes the Minister will know that the threatening question will not be asked. . . . The Marquis de Coutras belongs to a proud race! . . He is a man of noble mind and heart, the incarnation of aristocracy in its most refined and seductive aspects. . . . When we have destroyed it, what shall we put in its place?'

With a shrug of his broad shoulders he murmured :

'Rich and insolent bourgeois, perhaps, who will treat the poor people as though they were dogs, whilst these nobles, generous and polite as they always have been, love them in their own way sincerely enough.

Ah, we must succeed! A semi-revolution would be worse than the present state of things!'

Taking Pierre by the arm, he said:

'You may call on the Marquis de Coutras and thank him, for he is a fine man. As for Claude Brun, he is a rascal of the lowest kind!'

A flood of light entered Pierre's eyes as he asked:

'Then you are certain we have no longer anything to fear?'

'Certain; I have M. de Coutras' word for it.'

'Then I have complete liberty of action?'

'As complete as possible.'

'In that case, come with me.'

As he spoke he led Des Barres towards the staircase.

'What are you going to do?'

'You will see in a moment.'

At that instant an usher, a small, red-faced man, opened the door, and said to Des Barres in deferential tones:

'Ah, you have come to see us once more, monsieur. I hope you will soon be amongst us again. . . .'

Pierre had cast a glance through the door, which had been left ajar, and had seen, standing near a partition in a dark corner, Claude Brun attentively listening to everything that was taking place in the room. Whilst waiting for Des Barres, Pierre had seen the traitor glide in and out among the crowd. Barandet had accosted him, and a short conversation had taken place. Then Claude had mounted the stairs without suspecting that his movements were being watched. At that moment he had no idea that his rival was so near him. However, obeying a kind of magnetic impulse, he turned round. There he saw, standing

in front of the door, Pierre, who beckoned to him to leave the room. As he rose from his seat, the thought that possibly some arrangement was to be established between himself and Dartigues entered his brain.

He could not explain Pierre's intervention in any other way. On reaching the passage, he found himself in front of Des Barres, whom he was not acquainted with. Pierre closed the door, and with a gesture in the direction of Claude Brun, who stood waiting there, said:

'This is M. Claude Brun. Tell him, M. Des Barres, that his attack has failed, and that it is to you that he owes this failure. . . .'

The Socialist looked at Claude from head to foot, and in tones of irony, which made the traitor turn pale, said:

'Ah, monsieur is the friend of M. Dartigues? . . . Delighted to meet you, monsieur, and to inform you that it is useless for you to waste your time here, since M. de Coutras does not intend to speak!'

'Does not intend to speak?' repeated Claude, amazed.

'I think I express myself clearly,' said Des Barres—'does not intend to speak; for I have explained to him how infamous was the plot in which he was about to be inveigled!'

'And it is you, M. Des Barres—you, Dartigues' opponent, who . . .'

'Yes, indeed. . . . The Marquis de Coutras has just expressed his astonishment at the fact. . . . You pity me, don't you? I am very glad of it, for, I confess, I should not be too well pleased were my actions to meet with your approbation.'

Claude Brun was staggered; he seemed to see the wall dancing before his eyes, and Pierre and Des

Barres along with it. He felt himself so completely outplayed and despised, so powerless against those he hated, that a cry of rage burst from him. He took a few steps at hazard, as though on the point of falling, then, by a prodigy of will-power, he regained his moral and physical equilibrium. At the same time a spirit of evil seemed to enter him, as, with a look of intense insult at Pierre, he said :

'You are none the less the son of a rascal, M. Dartigues !'

Immediately he received a couple of sounding blows on his face. It was not Dartigues' son, but rather Bella's lover, who had struck the blows.

'There are your thirty pieces of silver, Judas !' said Pierre.

'Monsieur,' said Des Barres gravely, 'this was bound to take place. Certainly you invited what you have received. I should not have advised Pierre to pay you your salary in this way; but since he has taken the initiative, I confess I approve of his action.'

'He shall repay me with his life !' exclaimed Claude, livid with rage.

'We shall see about that !'

As Des Barres spoke he took Pierre by the arm, and led the way through the galleries, lecturing him as they went.

'What a fellow you are ! Why did you accost the villain ? You knew he would fall into a passion. It could not have been otherwise. You wanted to pick a quarrel with him. Ah, you might have left it to him ! He will not pocket this insult without saying anything.'

'I hope not !'

'And what will your mother think of all this ?'

'We will keep her in the dark.'

'She will hear about it all.'

'Yes, afterwards; that will matter little.'

'And if anything were to happen to you?'

'That would simplify everything.'

On hearing these words of despair, Des Barres stopped. He looked at Pierre, and said, in a tone of mingled sadness and sternness:

'Have you come to this? What! at the very first difficulties of life you expect to find some extreme solution which will settle questions without solving them? Are you a pupil of mine? Is that what I have taught you? Can it be possible that I, who have advocated energy and activity all my life, can have instilled discouragement into one whom I had dreamed of arming so completely to resist the struggle of the future?'

'Then,' excla:med Pierre, 'you ought not to have allowed me to imagine myself the son of an honest man. You have accustomed me to respect myself and mine, and then, suddenly, when I discover that the man whose name I bear is . . .'

He could not, perhaps would not, finish the sentence. With dull groan and clenched hands, he continued walking by the side of Des Barres. They were now crossing the Pont de la Concorde in the direction of the Place. Paris, in all its magnificence and glory, appeared on every hand. The rays of the sun flooded with light the fresh verdure of the Champs Élysées. Deep and silent, on their right, lay the Tuileries, behind their stone terraces and gilded gate. In front, at the end of the Rue Royale, with its whirling throng of carriages and foot-passengers, stood the Madeleine, stretching out to the heavens its roof of verdigris

copper. This rich and entrancing spectacle was enveloped in a pure, clear atmosphere.

'Just look,' said Des Barres; 'here we have one of the finest views in the world. It is in order to triumph and shine over Paris that so many abominable and treacherous deeds are committed. Here, on the very spot we are treading, the blood of a king has been shed, and waggon-loads full of victims led off to the scaffold. Do we look upon the Revolution as any the less sublime, and, in spite of these hecatombs, is this Place the less lacking in beauty? What is a mere period in the history of a people? What is a moment in the course of a lifetime? It is the ensemble that must be looked at. Just now you are suffering; to-morrow, however, you will be happy once more. If your happiness is of a lasting nature, you will be envied by all. Accordingly, don't give way to despair. But if you are unable to find consolation in philosophy, at any rate do not become ungrateful. You are loved, so you told me yourself. Not only have you a devoted mother, as well as Appel and myself, but also this charming Bella, who, at any rate, has given you her heart unreservedly. You appear not to remember anything of all this, and now, at twenty-five years of age, because a single difficulty has come into your life, you are regarding death as an advantageous solution of everything. I hope, for your own sake, that Bella will never hear of this, otherwise she would form a poor idea of your sentiments for her.'

By degrees, under the influence of his master's words, Pierre felt his courage revive. He raised his head; his cheeks had regained their natural colour. Looking at Des Barres with gratitude beaming in his eyes, he said:

'You are right in speaking to me as though I were a child, for I see quite well that I am not a man yet. I will follow your advice, for which I thank you earnestly. It is true I was weak and discouraged, for I suffered keenly. Still, it would be unjust on my part were I not to recognise that I am better treated than I deserve to be. It is to you that I owe everything; accordingly it is to you that I must prove my gratitude first. This I intend to do without losing a moment.'

'In what way?' asked Des Barres.

'That is my secret. Will you do me a service? Then please go and reassure my mother and Dr. Appel. Don't breathe a single word concerning the dispute with M. Claude Brun. I will see you again to-night.'

'What are you going to do?'

'Something indispensable, after what has taken place; I am going to see my father.'

Des Barres made no reply, but nodded approval. They took leave of one another. Pierre mounted the Champs Élysées; the Socialist, after watching him for a few seconds, shook his head, and said to himself: 'It is useless for us to theorize; we shall never do away with the inborn inequality of aptitudes and conditions. Here is a young fellow come into the world, and intended for an aristocrat. Neither environment nor instruction nor any other thing in the world can prevent it being so!'

Placing his cane under his arm, he proceeded in the direction of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, saying in conclusion:

'Des Barres, my friend, it is not society that must be changed, it is the human species. And, indeed, that is a vastly more difficult matter.'

CHAPTER XIII

THE footman announced :

'M. Pierre.'

Dartigues rose eagerly to meet his son, with outstretched hands and smiling face, though a kind of uneasiness appeared in his eyes.

'What ! you, my child ? I did not expect you this morning. What has happened ?'

As he spoke he looked inquiringly at his son. This was his way of gaining time and sounding the state of mind of those with whom he had to deal. Pierre, stiff and cold in bearing, submitted to his father's embraces without responding to them in the least. After a few moments he said curtly :

'I have just called to reassure you, father.'

'Why ?'

'I have been to the Chambre.'

'Ah !'

Dartigues' face turned pallid, then the blood suddenly rose to his cheeks, and an unsteady look came into his eyes. Still, he retained perfect possession of himself, and asked calmly :

'So you had been informed ? . . .'

'Of Claude Brun's move ? Yes, I was one of the first to hear of it. It was directed against me quite as much as against you.'

'The wretch! However, he has failed—miserably failed!'

'You know it already?'

'Yes, Barandet has just telephoned to me.'

Pierre smiled ironically.

'What faithful servants you have! Claude Brun was one of them. Are Messrs. Barandet and Rémançon as well informed about your affairs?'

'My child, what do you mean? Do you think that, if Claude Brun had been as well informed as he pretended to be, this move of his would have had no issue? It is because his libellous calumnies had no solid foundation that the Marquis de Coutras would not take proceedings. . . .'

'Ah, you think so?'

'What! Think so? I am absolutely certain! He had nothing important in his possession—nothing whatever! I should have to acknowledge I did not know my political enemies were I to think that the deputy for Morbihan, if capable of injuring the Ministry by reason of the interest the latter has shown in my candidature, had abandoned all idea of questioning it when once the faintest solid pretext had been offered. Ah, they could find nothing against me! They have pretended and bluffed, as they say in America. With me, however, such proceedings do not count. I have seen enough in my life, and am no longer caught by them. No, no, my child, I was not anxious in the least; I expected this result. There are still law-courts in France against libellers and slanderers. Even though members of Parliament, they can be accused. And before the assize court accusations must be proved. You know, one must show one's proofs! . . .'

His language gradually became more animated; he had commenced with the intention of persuading Pierre, and was beginning to become convinced himself of the truth of his statements. As in his youth, he was the first to believe in his own arguments. Certain as he found himself of having nothing to fear from the attack which had been prepared against him, he had no scruples in carrying the war into the enemy's territory; though scarcely freed from Claude's accusations, he was ready to accuse him in turn. Pierre looked at his father in gloomy sadness, and listened to him as he plunged into an utter forgetfulness of everything that was outside of his own personality.

At that moment he felt tempted to let Dartigues continue, not to reveal to him the secret of his escape, and thus learn to know him better. He could have caught him now *en flagrant délit* of perfidy and cynicism, and behind all these appearances of generosity and kindness have seen the real Dartigues, the man he suspected of having ruined his mother's life, calumniated Appel, and, doubtless, acted as the accomplice of all these sharpers gravitating around him for purposes of deceit, peculation, and fraud. He sat there in icy silence. Dartigues, for his part, encouraged by success, walked up and down the room as was his wont, and continued:

'Besides, what could they have said different from what has been told in print scores of times—that we had recourse to the services of the Administration in the matter of the canal we constructed from the salt lakes to Gabès? Nonsense! In the first place, that would have to be proved. And then afterwards?

Is it possible to undertake anything whatever without the Administration? Because it offers us certain facilities, is that a reason why we should pay it? Rather a speedy conclusion! People who voice such grievances would be quite capable of acting in this way if they are so ready to suppose that others do so. I have no confidence in those who are so well acquainted with the good and bad sides of human nature. Generally they are anything but scrupulous persons. Besides, it was Brun who managed the Gabès affair. It is quite possible he may be responsible for what he wishes to charge me with. That we shall see, for he will have to hand in his accounts to me. And once I am elected member for Maillane, no one shall force me to proceed along paths I have no intention of traversing.'

On hearing these words, Pierre started. With eyes fixed on Dartigues, he asked:

'Do you still think of maintaining your candidature?'

'What! Think of maintaining my candidature? Do you expect me to give up the struggle now? What more could I have done had I been convicted of these so-called accusations? Even then I would have remained firm! Would not the very fact of yielding have been an acknowledgment of guilt? I should still have continued the struggle in spite of everything! Now, of course, I am more determined than ever!'

'Take care! One often spares a man who remains in the background, whereas the one exposed to public view is struck to the ground.'

'You see they have not struck me to the ground,

for they cannot. Take my word for it, my ground is quite firm.'

'What do you expect to gain from this election?'

'Everything! The second part of my career is now beginning. Hitherto I have spent all my energies in making a fortune; in the future I shall think of nothing but social position. You see, I have mighty ambitions; I intend to climb to a lofty height. For one like myself there is nothing it is impossible to accomplish. I will bring France into a condition of grandeur and prosperity. Travelling about makes one acquainted with the needs and aspirations of all kinds of races and nations. I will carry on business with the whole universe, to the profit of this country of ours. Ah, this was the hope I began to cherish once I saw that fortune was smiling on me. And now, just at a time when I am in full possession of both mental and physical strength, you ask me whether I do not think of giving up the struggle. All my life has been spent in strife, and I shall struggle on to my last breath. But it will be to win the most brilliant of victories, one which will assure the supremacy of the country in which I was born poor, but where I intend to die rich and powerful.'

Carried away by this dream, his face seemed transfigured, and his eyes shone with excitement. Pierre was bitterly grieved to discover that his father's superior qualities were rendered useless by an utter absence of moral faculty. At this moment he saw him as he must have been throughout his life, sacrificing everything to his ambition, and almost deserving of absolution through the very power of this ambition which manifested his genius. And yet, how painful

it was to have to acknowledge such eminent qualities just at a time when proof was certain of the blemishes which annulled those other good qualities. In the person of Dartigues appeared the unscrupulous but fortunate adventurer, and it was his own son whom he called upon to witness his right to attain to success by any means whatever. Pierre said coldly :

'All your calculations are based on a false foundation, father. You cannot hope for what this Maillane election might have had in reserve for you, because your candidature is now rendered impossible.'

Dartigues started.

'Are you dreaming ?'

'No, father ; it is you who have been living in a land of dreams, and it is indeed a great pain for me to arouse you to the real state of things.'

'The Maillane election impossible ? Why ?'

'Because Des Barres is your opponent.'

'Well, how does that affect me ? He is a friend of yours, I know, so I will be considerate with him for your sake. But if he attacks me, I must defend myself, and try to win the victory. That is only right, is it not ?'

'No, it is not right, for he has just done you the greatest service one man could do another, and that entirely through friendship for me.'

Dartigues looked keenly at his son, with eyes full of suspicion, as he asked :

'May I ask the nature of this precious service he has done me ?'

Pierre rose from his seat, and said in firm accents :

'He has this very day saved your honour.'

'He ?'

'Yes. Listening to my entreaties, he called on the Marquis de Coutras and begged him to abandon his intention of speaking against you.'

'Your entreaties?' exclaimed Dartigues. 'What! Without knowing, without listening to me, you have taken up sides against me? You really believed the inventions of a wretch whose mind was poisoned, and actually requested a stranger, my opponent, to interfere in my affairs?'

'I was obliged to save you!'

'What proof have you that I needed help? Was I not able to defend myself? I was quite in a position to do so, and, thinking all the time you had saved me, you have really betrayed me!'

He was raging with passion as the words came pouring from his lips. From his desk he had taken up a large pair of iron scissors, which he was bending between his fingers as though they had been made of rubber.

'Father,' said Pierre, 'do not try to deceive me. The certainty of your present safety has given you courage. All the same, the peril you have incurred has been a deadly and certain one.'

'You imbecile! What do you know about the matter? Have you seen the accusation?' exclaimed Dartigues, utterly exasperated. 'Has the file been in your hands?'

'No,' said Pierre. 'But I have been in possession of Galbran's file.'

'Galbran's file!' stammered Dartigues in amazement. 'That wretch's file. Then it was you who bought it?'

'Yes, father,' said Pierre sorrowfully. 'That was

the only use I could make of the money you gave me. It helped me to defend your safety. . . .'

Between father and son there fell a silence heavy as lead.

'And did you read the file?' asked Dartigues finally.

'Oh, no! . . . no! I burnt it without reading a word! . . . One sorrowful evening, when my mind was filled with bitter reflections . . . I burnt it, although cruelly tempted to run over the contents, and I acted in this way because someone in whom I had absolute confidence ordered me to do so.'

'Ordered you? . . . Who was it?'

Pierre looked up with a sad smile.

'My mother.'

'Ah!' said Dartigues, again walking excitedly up and down the office. Shortly he came to a halt in front of his son, and said anxiously: 'What reason did she give you?'

'One only: a son has no right to suspect his father. Ah, had it depended on her alone, this terrible trial would have been spared me. In her generous pride, she would have said nothing, to avoid sullying my mind and causing me such anguish of heart. But others, your friends, those who knew you only through your actions, have spoken, and I have been forced to learn why I have been brought up by a deserted mother, and why the one who replaced you, in his clairvoyant foresight, did me the supreme honour of giving me his name.'

'Pierre!'

'Ah, father, I would gladly have avoided this explanation had you not rendered it necessary. We must now go right to the end; we must both be perfectly

frank with one another. Since I entered the room I have been watching you, listening and preparing to judge you. For pity's sake, think of the situation. My affection and respect for you will depend on what you are now about to say and do. If you do not object to being accused by those to whom you are indifferent, don't, at any rate, run the risk of being condemned by your own son.'

Dartigues regained his *sang-froid* as though by enchantment. Seating himself in front of Pierre, he said in dignified tones :

'My son, I had no idea I should have to keep guard over my expressions in talking with you. You shall not tax me with having dissembled, for I have not kept back anything from you. I have laid before you my whole ambition, thinking I could rely on your affection. I now perceive that I had confounded your sentiments with my own, and that, when I placed myself at your disposal, you were holding yourself in reserve, and thinking of the way in which you would treat me.'

He smiled.

'After all, I prefer such an attitude, for it will facilitate my task, and place me at my ease. What we are about to discuss is almost a business matter, so that I shall be quite in my element. Are you aware of the importance of the sacrifice you ask of me ?'

'I know that, from a moral point of view, you ought to consent to it.'

'Mere fancy !' said Dartigues in mocking accents. 'What obligations one places one's self under when it would be so easy to free one's self from them ! You say that M. des Barres has done me a great service.

Granted. He has done it at your request. Granted again. But, then, have I placed in his hands the protection of my interests? As the result of a step he has taken independent of my will, am I to consider myself unreservedly bound? Come, come, my dear friend; such a state of things will not bear investigation.'

'The question is not, father, whether *you* are bound,' replied Pierre forcibly, 'but rather whether *I* am. I have undertaken engagements in your name; I have acted to the best of your interests in order to safeguard your honour. And this I have done quite as much for you as for myself. We are jointly responsible for one another. Des Barres has acted with unbounded generosity. When I come to ask you to act with the same disinterestedness, what reply will you give me?'

'My dear Pierre, just listen. . . .'

'Ah, in your own interests, refrain from discussing! Every word you say tears from my heart a portion of the respect I wish to feel for you. Say yes or no simply; it will be quicker and more dignified! . . .'

Dartigues stood up resolutely, and said:

'Well, since you wish it—no!'

'Do you refuse me?'

'To sacrifice to you all my ambitions? Certainly! Come now, do you take me for a child? Just think what you are asking for. It is for you I am preparing to act. It is your patrimony I wish to increase tenfold, your name I wish to make illustrious. . . . You can form no idea how far I wish to push my fortunes once I place my feet on the first step of power. Once the future belongs to me, everything, understand me—everything will belong to me.'

'Very good, but I shall not be there to assist at your triumph!'

'What is that you say?'

Pierre passed over his brow a moist, cold hand.

'Ah, father, my happiness is over. You have destroyed my last illusion. I might have believed that in the battle of interests you had been dragged along farther than your delicacy might have liked. You were poor, anxious to succeed. The struggle was hard; besides, your advisers were not disinterested. I was ready to absolve you. I was ready to forget the evil you have done others as well as myself. I was so anxious to love and respect you that I would have closed my eyes over the past had you been willing to give me the slightest guarantee for the future. But since you are intractable, since your ambition is stronger than your love, since you refuse me the honourable recompense I ask in return for so great a service so nobly rendered by a man of integrity, I will leave you. I will finish what you began twenty years ago when you abandoned my mother and myself. . . . Good-bye, father, good-bye—this time for ever!'

He was leaving the room, when his father, overwhelmed by the accents of grief so evident in his son's words, asked anxiously:

'Where are you going?'

'What matters it to you?'

'I will not have you leaving me in this way!'

'I cannot possibly stay after what has just taken place between us.'

'Think over the matter! Do not decide on any extreme solution. . . .'

He placed his hand on his son's shoulder, and in insinuating tones whispered in his ear :

'Think of Bella !'

'Ah,' exclaimed Pierre in despair, 'you are crueller than I imagined ! Bella ! . . .'

'Do you wish to see her no more ? It is in my house she lives ; her mother follows my advice. It is on me she depends, and I will give her to you. . . .'

'Too late !'

'Have you abandoned all thought of living in happiness ?'

The young man replied in resolute though sorrowful accents :

'I have abandoned all thought of living at all !'

His voice sent a thrill through Dartigues' heart. Filled with a presentiment of some imminent catastrophe or other, he said imperiously :

'What do you mean ?'

'Nothing extraordinary, father. Whilst M. des Barres was defending you against Claude Brun's treachery, I was avenging you for his insulting language. . . . Furious at the disappointment he had met, he burst into outrageous language against you. . . . Then . . .'

'Then ?' repeated Dartigues, almost in a whisper.

'Then I treated him as his insolence deserved, and as my feelings of hatred impelled me. In my rage, I closed his mouth with a blow. . . .'

'Good,' said Dartigues. 'You merely took my place. . . . In future I must do without a substitute. . . . No encounter is possible between you and Claude Brun. I shall not permit it. . . .'

'Will he ask for your permission ? And do you

expect me to await your good pleasure? No, I shall fulfil my destiny, which consists in paying for all the evil and unjust actions you have committed in life. You have betrayed your companion; he hates you, and it is I who am to pay the debt. . . . You have tortured my mother, I understand quite well now, for since you have shown yourself pitiless for me, how can you have been otherwise for her? You have thought of trafficking on Bella's love, as though she belonged to you; the poor child will now, in her turn, shed tears of despair. . . . Misfortune awaits everyone who approaches you; you are fatal to all alike. . . . Keep your ambition and egoism; all those dependent on you will ever be miserable. Be happy, father, if you can, by making others suffer!'

'How dare you speak to me in this way!' exclaimed Dartigues, retreating in horror before the maddened grief he saw depicted on his son's features.

'Why should you be astonished? Is not my lack of respect quite easy to understand? I am your son! Is not my brutality natural? I take after you! Have you ever spared anything or anyone who resisted your will? You have sacrificed everything to your fancies and desires! Good! I too am a Dartigues, and have no scruples before my own father! It is in the blood! Wait till I have shed all mine, then perhaps I shall change!'

'Calm yourself!' said Dartigues, attempting to seize Pierre. 'For the time being you are mad! . . . Reflect a little! . . . The language you are using is terrible! . . . You will regret it. . . .'

'No!'

'Do you think I do not love you?'

'You love no one but yourself!'

Dartigues turned pale.

'What you are now saying is perfectly abominable! Besides, it is false, false! Before I met you, my heart was closed to everything but ambition, but since then I am completely changed! . . . I no longer recognise myself as the same person.'

'You flatter yourself, father; you are always the same!'

'Then you think I lied whenever I spoke affectionately to you?'

'What do mere manifestations of affection cost you?'

'And when I clasped you in my arms, was that merely a way I had of deceiving you?'

'How can I tell?'

'But do you not see that you are torturing me this very moment? I am now suffering the greatest grief I ever endured the whole of my life!'

'Mere acting!'

Tears started from Dartigues' eyes:

'Cruel child! But after all, it is I speaking through your mouth! Those terrible words you have just uttered I have said myself! I refused to believe in love and pain. I would not believe that the tears I caused to flow were sincere. And this is my punishment! It is nothing but just! But to be punished by you, the only one I ever really loved! You see, I acknowledge my faults. I have been a cruel husband, an unworthy father, an ungrateful friend. I can endure all the accusations you have brought against me, except one: that of not loving you!'

Beseechingly, he held out his hands to his son.

Pierre felt a thrill of emotion run through his frame. He saw that Dartigues was perfectly sincere.

'Father!' he stammered.

'Yes, a real father now. You have quite conquered me. Against the others I could have struggled on, but against you—oh no! I feel I am vanquished. Your very reproaches torture me. And now you speak to me of dying, I am ready to do anything to avoid such a misfortune. Pierre! my child! . . . Pardon me for all the harm I have done you. . . . So far as I possibly can, I will make reparation for it all. Swear to me that this meeting between you and Claude will not take place, and that you will not try to separate yourself from me. . . . And now listen to me. . . . You wish me to renounce my candidature —all my hopes, in short. . . . You shall have a proof of the depth of my affection for you. . . . Just now, when listening to your reproaches and threats, I refused. . . . Your grief, however, will no longer permit me to hesitate. Shall I do as you wish? Say that you demand it, and that, if I obey, you will believe that I love you?'

Pierre's face shone with joy.

'Yes, I will believe it, father.'

'Very good! I will grant you this satisfaction. . . . I give you my word!'

Pierre, motionless and trembling, almost breathless, looked at his father. Dartigues said tenderly:

'Are you satisfied now?'

As he spoke, the two men were clasped in one another's arms.

At that moment, a gentle voice was heard coming through the window from the garden:

'M. de Maillane, are you there? I have been told you are not alone. . . .'

'That is Bella!' said Dartigues.

He opened the window, dragging Pierre along with him.

'Quite true; I am not alone, as you see. . . .'

'Ah! M. Pierre!'

She blushed, and a light shone from her eyes.

'Have you yet much to say to one another?'

'No, my dear child, we have finished. Shall I send him to you?'

'I should be very glad if you would.'

Dartigues closed the window, and said to his son:

'Now you may go to Bella, with your mind quite at ease. . . . I will attend to your affairs.'

'Just as you please, father.'

He left the room, and, a moment after, Dartigues saw him slowly walking by Bella's side around the lawn, amid the fresh green turf, the bright rays of the spring sun gladdening the face of Nature. With a sigh, Dartigues closed the window, and rang the bell:

'Have MM. Barandet and Rémançon come?' he asked.

'They are waiting in the small salon,' said the footman, who had answered the call.

'Beg them to step this way.'

He began to walk to and fro in his study, as was his wont whenever his mind was preoccupied. After carelessly bidding his friends good-morning, the two latter sat down, waiting for him to speak, and anxious for his sake, knowing as they did the cause of the trouble. Finally, he came to a sudden stop.

'Has either of you seen Claude Brun?' he asked.

'I spoke to him this morning after the incident,' said Rémançon. 'His cheek was still red. . . .'

'The villain! He deserved far worse than he received.'

'Ah! our young friend Pierre goes to work with a will; he strikes like a real Dartigues.'

'What did the rascal say to you?

'That he would have his revenge.'

'He can think of nothing besides revenge. Does he imagine that he alone has the right to use the word? I will show him that he does not hold the monopoly to it.'

'He is beside himself.'

'Indeed? Well! what must I be after the trick he has tried to play me? He thought I was defenceless, quite at his mercy. Fool as he was, he took advantage of his position. But his plotting has turned out quite useless, and he has not compromised me as he hoped to do. Now he is unarmed, and I can do with him as I please. . . .'

'So I gave him to understand,' said Rémançon. 'But he was in no fit condition for reasoning calmly.'

'Well! my dear friend, would you have the kindness to call on him again? It seems he wishes to kill my son. . . .'

'That is what he said many times over, repeating it with the most horrible threats.'

'He will change his mind and tone when you tell him, from me, that if he does not leave this very evening for Marseilles, and is not at Tunis within a week, without attempting to see Pierre, I will ruin him, though I spend ten million francs in doing so. . . . You know quite well what I mean, and that,

within a week, I can reduce him to bankruptcy. He has been so imprudent as to speculate without my advice, and I know his combination, just as he knew my secrets. . . . These secrets, however, are no longer at his disposal. . . . The proofs he held have left his hands. He can do nothing further against me, whilst I have full power over his actions. Take him my ultimatum: If he does not leave France at once, I will ruin him!'

Barandet solemnly raised his head.

'If he will come to terms, will you be indulgent? All this bickering and strife is greatly to be regretted. . . . Our business is suffering from it severely. . . . And business, my dear friend, is the most important thing in life.'

'Just explain that to this imbecile of a Claude Brun, who, at forty-five, falls in love with a girl young enough to be his daughter, and disturbs plans we have all so carefully worked out, to obtain the result you see.'

'Certainly he has been in the wrong; that we have repeated to him over and over again. . . . But a man in love turns quite stupid. He has indeed reached a fine pass now: he has quarrelled with you; he will not obtain the hand of the young girl; and he is running the risk of a collapse in his business relations. But, then, he has been struck. . . . And that by his rival! Can he forgive that?'

'Forgive that, indeed! Will he be more sensitive than he was at Guaymas, where the haciendero Ramirès almost thrashed him to death, on discovering that Claude Brun had robbed him in a wool contract? . . Ramirès waited for him, revolver in hand.

. . . Claude turned his back to him, and submitted to the punishment. . . . Did he pick a quarrel with Lytleton at Philadelphia, when the latter had him expelled from the Commercial Club? Nothing of the kind! He regarded his interests as more important than his self-esteem. And it will be the same now, or he shall see what will happen to him! To tell the truth, I am exacting very little. To think that he has employed threats against me, and I did not fling him out of the window! Now, however, there shall be no more weakness. I am the master; he must remember this, and obey in consequence.'

'If he does obey you, you will not bear him a grudge?'

'Is it in my nature to do so? I strike, and afterwards think no more about the matter.'

'Well, then, rely on us. He shall leave France, or tell us the reason why!'

'Let him keep silent in future; he has spoken far too much already. And give him to understand that Paris is not a very healthy place for him to live in. After all, Pierre might very well settle the matter himself.'

'True enough! Well, good-bye.'

That morning Mme. Appel felt a vague, uncertain dread come over her. Mlle. Hermandez's visit and her son's joy ought to have scattered all those uneasy fears that had beset her for several weeks past. And yet she felt sad, as though some misfortune or other were threatening. She spoke of this to the doctor, who gently scolded her, and took great care not to inform her of the serious complications which had intervened. He affected perfect serenity,

and went off as usual to the Faculté to his lectures. Francine saw that Pierre had not returned home for lunch, and although Appel kept a strict watch over himself, she noticed that he was absent-minded at times, as though expecting some event to be announced, or news of some kind. After lunch, he left the house on his visiting round, and the poor woman was again left alone. As usual, she entered the small salon and began to work. The silence of the room, however, and her solitude oppressed her heavily; her impatience and the feeling of sadness, for which she could find no reason, seemed to her intolerable. Unwilling any longer to remain alone, she took up her hat and cloak, and left the house.

As she walked slowly along the Rue du Luxembourg, with bowed head, her thoughts far away, she did not notice that a man had descended from a carriage, stationed about a hundred yards from her door, and was following her from a distance. After all, would she have recognised him had she seen him? His beard was now almost entirely gray, and his cheeks were becoming hollow. Was it the gay and brilliant Dartigues or his ghost which was following her? Again, how could she have suspected that he should care to see her again? She continued slowly, with almost hesitating steps, almost unconscious of the passers-by.

On reaching the Place Saint-Sulpice, the sight of the church gave a certain amount of fixity to her thoughts. Raising her head, she quickened her pace, and made her way towards the entrance-steps. Mounting these, she distributed alms to the beggars standing beneath the porch, and entered. Her footsteps glided

over the flags of the aisles, as she proceeded along the deserted chapels, through whose stained windows pierced a mystic light. Reaching the farthest and most retired of these chapels, she halted in front of a *prie-Dieu*, and sank to her knees.

The man who had followed her now also stopped about a dozen steps away. Hidden by the shadow of a stone pillar, with arms crossed and grave countenance, he stood watching her as she prayed. Had he any idea why he was waiting there? By what irresistible sentiment, by what imperious duty, had he been impelled towards the house in which Francine lived, and induced to follow her into this church? What did he hope to obtain? He could not have said. Still, he experienced a bitter pleasure at finding himself, mute and anxious, in the presence of this woman who had once been his own wife. She was doubtless praying to God on behalf of Pierre, and thus drawing nearer to himself by means of the only bond they had in common: love of their son. She remained there kneeling; the movement of her shoulders told him, after a moment's interval, that she was weeping.

Dartigues now approached almost to within reaching distance of Francine. Leaning over the grated door, in an attitude of devotion, perhaps praying himself, he stood there in the silence of the sacred edifice. The church was deserted; they two were quite alone. Suddenly, as though she had a dim warning that someone was witnessing her prayers and tears, Francine stood upright, turned round, and a blush mounted to her face as she saw this man by her side.

He made not the slightest movement either of

advance or retreat. She looked at him anxiously. Suddenly their eyes met, and she recognised him. Pallid, and with terrified gesture, she exclaimed :

' Dartigues !'

With a profound bow, he said :

' Yes, Dartigues, who begs you to listen to him. . . .'

' What do you want with me ?'

He saw such a world of anguish in her look that he hastened to reassure her :

' I wish to speak to you about Pierre, about yourself, and if you will allow me, a little about myself. Oh ! do not be afraid ! . . . You will hear nothing but the most gentle and respectful words imaginable. I know what you have made of this child. . . . And I admire quite as much as I envy you.'

She looked at him once more, and seeing that his emotion was sincere, all fear of him left her. Slowly sinking down into the chair by her side, she listened to him, though she had not given him permission to speak. Now that she had regained perfect self-possession, she began to examine Dartigues without his noticing it, and, in this well-dressed man, whose countenance seemed thoughtful and grave, she had considerable difficulty in recognising the light-hearted enthusiast of former days. Years had passed, and in this silent, dim church these two phantoms of the past met once more as though at the edge of the tomb. Dartigues continued :

' You are very happy, Francine, as you deserve to be. The certainty that one has legitimately earned one's happiness is doubtless its very essence, for everything in my life has succeeded ; I have found my son again, and am accordingly as greatly favoured as your-

self, and yet there is a burden at my heart which stifles me, and of which I wish to free myself at whatever cost.'

Lowering his voice, as though in confession, he continued :

'I believe it is regret for all the harm I have done, and remorse for all the suffering I have caused both you and others, that has filled me with a feeling of oppression. . . . Instinctively, I came to you. . . . I watched for you in the street, before your door, for I should never have found the courage to call on you. . . . Then I followed you. . . . When you entered this church, I felt it was here only that I should be able to speak to you, and obtain your . . .'

She looked at him steadily, and asked :

'My what ?'

In low, humble accents, he replied :

'Your pardon.'

She raised her hand as though in absolution. He stopped her :

'Wait a little ; you can have no idea of my guilt. . . . I do not wish to steal your pardon. . . . You may find that I am unworthy of your indulgence. . . .'

'What have you done against me more than I already know ?'

He lowered his head.

'When I again saw my son, I formed a vile project : I dreamt of taking him away, stealing him from you. . . .'

A shudder passed over her, as she replied :

'I knew it. I guessed such a thought would come into your mind.'

He looked at her in grieved surprise.

'What? You suspected this? You were able to defend yourself. . . . And yet you ordered this child not to judge his father. . . . He might have cast a glance over the pages of my adventurous and sorrowful past. . . . And you dissuaded him. . . . Whatever affection he still retains for me I owe to you. . . . And it is so, Francine, that you have avenged yourself for all the harm I had done you, and intended still to do you. . . .'

His voice was almost choked with emotion, and he turned aside, ashamed of the tears flowing down his cheeks. Francine, however, turned to him with a gentle smile.

'I bear you no ill-will, Dartigues. I pitied you sincerely. Assuredly I loved my son, and have been grateful towards those who have helped me. . . . This very moment, from the very depth of my soul, however guilty you may have been, I pardon you.'

'You are a saint,' he said, bowing before her. 'I shall leave you in a calmer frame of mind and more confident regarding the future. I seem to imagine that you have washed away all my faults. . . . Enjoy your happiness, Francine, for you deserve it. And be sure I will do all I can to contribute to Pierre's. . . . Alas! I can atone for very few of the wrongs I have done him. However, it will be a great joy to me to find that I am not altogether useless.'

She shook her head sorrowfully.

'I have been told that you are very wealthy. Don't give Pierre any money. . . . He must work to appreciate the pleasures of success. . . . Let him have no share in your riches. Only so will he be happy.'

'I will give him the wife he loves, Francine. She

is a charming and good girl, who will love you like a true daughter. . . . The radiant joy of these two children will charm your declining years.'

On hearing these words, there came over her countenance a momentary glimpse of her grace of former days. As in a lightning-flash, Dartigues saw once more the Francine he had loved. She rose to her feet, and with a sigh, he bowed in respect, and, taking her hand, lifted it to his lips. When she raised her eyes, he was already some steps distant. The dim outline of his form could be seen along the aisle until it disappeared behind the pillars. Francine, her heart beating with emotion, was once more alone. Again she sank to her knees, and, raising to God a heart filled with gratitude and peace, she resumed her prayers.

CHAPTER XIV

THE sun shone in the blue heavens over the port of Gabès, decked with flags, whilst the streets were crowded with sight-seers. The *souks* and *douars*, Arab tents of every description, had been left empty within a circuit of ten leagues, and whole families had travelled, some by rail, others in rustic carts drawn by horses or asses, from early morn, through clouds of dust driven along by gusts from the south, burning with the heat of the desert they had crossed. The inauguration of the canal joining the lakes to the sea had attracted these crowds. Public rejoicings and fêtes had been proclaimed in the surrounding villages, and everyone knew that there were to be held caic races on the lake, as well as swimming matches, with prizes in cash. The company that had constructed the canal was paying the entire expenses, and M. de Maillane's generosity was well known.

For the past three weeks he had been residing in his palace at Hammama. Claude Brun had also taken up his quarters there, and was living on terms of the closest intimacy with his partner. What new treaty had been entered upon between these two men? What mysterious understanding had brought about such perfect accord? Neither Barandet nor Rémançon could have answered these questions, had they been

asked. On reaching Gabès, Dartigues had found Claude awaiting him on the landing-stage as he stepped from the steamer. They had shaken hands, and the same carriage had driven them to Hammama. After dining together, they had entered Dartigues' study, and been engaged in conversation until far on into the night. On separating for their respective rooms, they had exchanged confident smiles as in the days of their perfect intimacy. Brun had said in the hearing of the servants :

'Very good, I will do as you wish.'

Dartigues had wished him good-night, and no explanation had been given of this fresh understanding now established between them. What could no longer be doubted was that they certainly were of one mind, and that Claude seemed no longer to bear the slightest grudge against Dartigues, who, on his part, seemed to have forgotten his grievances against his companion. And yet, what grounds they had for mutual hatred! The ambitious dream created in the imagination of the one, and the imperious desire conceived in the heart of the other, had in each case proved abortive. Each had defeated the other's purpose. Dartigues might accuse Claude of having ruined him from a political point of view, whilst Brun had the right to accuse Dartigues of having robbed him of his dream of happiness.

At heart they must have detested one another, in spite of their smiling countenances. In this sumptuous palace they lived together like two brothers. In the gardens, filled with plants and flowers of great value, converting the whole spot into a veritable paradise, they strolled about every evening, always alone,

chatting quietly. Dartigues, whose active nature would not permit him to be idle, spent part of his days in the dockyards superintending the final excavations of the docks which were to unite the canal to the sea. Immense flood-gates had been constructed, separated from the Mediterranean by iron gates, which were worked by means of steam-engines. These gates could be opened and closed in a few minutes by gigantic windlasses, which filled up or drained these docks, intended for the construction and repairing of the vessels.

The docks, which were empty and walled round with stone and concrete, resembled huge cyclopean constructions. Stone pillars forming arcades surrounded the harbour with a mighty girdle in perfect symmetry. The ensemble was a prodigy of industrial engineering. Dartigues was fond of strolling about in the narrow channel which was to bring the water into the dock. The simplicity of the mechanism which set the iron gates in motion was the object of his special admiration. In a few seconds these huge masses of metal turned on their axes, to set free a veritable giant waterspout. A winding staircase gave access into the lock. Dartigues always descended by this staircase.

On the morning of the fête a grand lunch had been provided for the authorities and friends of the directors, who had come together from great distances, and now met in the large dining-hall of the palace. Dartigues had never appeared in such good-temper. He did the honours of his sumptuous dwelling with a charm and courtesy which placed everyone at his ease. The General commanding the forces, who had felt a certain amount of repugnance at meeting so many

business people, and during the whole meal had held himself in reserve, had himself been won over by the cordiality of the master of the house.

The representative of the civil administration was in ecstasy. The Gabès works, so promptly completed, and of such importance to the country, assured his Minister of a great success in the Chambre when the discussion of the Budget should be introduced. Ah, it would be useless to criticise the Resident-General after the execution of so grandiose a work. This time the Cabinet would know what kind of a reply to give. And it was to Dartigues that such a result was due. On the terrace, planted with rose-laurels and tamarisks, Barandet and Rémançon, strolling about in the shade of the Moorish arcades, which permitted of outdoor exercise sheltered from wind, rain, and sun, rivalled one another in exciting the enthusiasm of this functionary.

'Is it possible that such a man as Dartigues should be anywhere else than in the Chambre? In the Maillane election the Ministry has shown itself deplorably weak! It has allowed itself to be governed by the Socialist party, and to be intimidated by Des Barres. . . . Still, can it not find a seat for so useful and devoted a man? Think of it—the port of Gabès and the canal leading into the lakes would permit of the whole French fleet being sheltered in case of war, awaiting an opportunity to attack the enemy. . . . With Bizerte on the one side and Gabès on the other, we have the safe command of the Mediterranean.'

'Doubtless . . .'

'Really, there are sufficient doctors and lawyers in Parliament. It is high time to elect a few practical men.'

'Quite true!'

Such expressions as 'doubtless' and 'quite true' on the part of the Government representative appeared rather monotonous in the long-run to the two flatterers, so they fell back on the general, who was smoking an excellent cigar, and drinking coffee with the officials invited to the ceremony. Dartigues, whose letters had just been brought to him, had retired for a moment to his study. An hour was still to elapse before the opening of the flood-gates. An immense crowd was collected on the sides of the dock; the tableau offered was an extremely picturesque one. On a slightly-raised eminence was placed an artillery section at the foot of a mast decked with flags; their duty was to fire a score of cannon-shots to inaugurate the opening of the harbour and its formal cession to the representatives of the Government. Whilst the guests, well seated and sheltered, were lazily contemplating the preparations, Claude Brun approached Barandet and asked him:

'Do you know where Dartigues is?'

'He has just retired to his study, where he must be engaged reading his letters. . . .'

'The director of the works is looking for him. He wishes to have his final instructions. . . .'

'Ah, there is plenty of time!'

'No; he says there is no time to be lost. . . .'

'In that case go and inform Dartigues. . . .'

Claude Brun moved away. Dartigues was seated in his study reading a letter from his son. A happy smile illumined his face as he repeated the final affectionate greeting, and placing the paper on his desk, he sat there in a reverie. He had left Paris and his family three months ago, after the marriage of Pierre

and Bella. His imagination pictured them in their modest apartments in the Rue de Rennes, a suite of rooms on the second floor, comfortably though simply furnished, for the young couple were not rich, having accepted from their parents a bare sufficiency, this being an absolute condition formulated by Pierre and accepted by Bella. The husband had not been portioned by his father, and had accepted nothing from anyone except Dr. Appel. Bella, on the other hand, had been treated by Mme. de Maillane like a young girl belonging to the Parisian bourgeoisie; she had received a dowry of two hundred thousand francs. As a result they were perfectly happy.

Dartigues himself had left Paris on the eve of the marriage for Gabès, where Claude Brun was expecting him, so that the ceremony had been performed in his absence. Just on the point of leaving, however, he had found at the station Pierre and Bella come to bid him good-bye. He had been rewarded by the tender, affectionate words they had spoken; he felt that he was pardoned, and knew that he was loved. And this had helped him to sacrifice himself, as it was his duty to do. At this moment, as he sat in the splendid study, sumptuously decorated with Oriental luxury, cool and fresh in spite of the torrid heat outside, and discreetly shaded notwithstanding the devouring sun, he was thinking of these two children, summoned before his presence by the aid of this letter, brimming over with affection which had just come to gladden his heart. A knock came to the door, and a harsh dry voice asked: 'Are you there?' Claude appeared on the threshold, and Dartigues, rising to his feet, crossed the room to meet his partner.

'What is the matter?'

'The final orders have to be given for the opening of the sluices. You are the only one who can give them. The director is here waiting. . . .'

'I will come at once.'

He left the room, followed by Claude, who, on seeing him accost the director, re-entered the study. The open letter on the table had attracted his attention. So it was this which had caused Dartigues to forget his most important affairs. Guessing that it was from Pierre and Bella, he stole softly to the table, listened attentively, looked all around, and certain that he was alone, seized the paper with a rapid gesture, as a thief would have done. His hands trembled, and his dark face turned pale. He had not been mistaken—the letter was from Pierre. He began to read, and as he continued his brow grew moist with the sweat of anguish, and despair and hate could plainly be read on his countenance. In this terrible letter, so frankly and tenderly written by an enamoured poet, was revealed the whole love of Bella and Pierre. He quivered with envy of his rival's joy, and trembled at the latter's triumphant confessions. What happiness and hopes were theirs! Everything appeared on this atrocious sheet of paper, which he crumpled convulsively beneath his fevered fingers. In the silence of the lofty, dark room he shrieked aloud with passion, then, sinking into a chair, tears began to flow down his cheeks. This was the end; this was more than he could bear. Hitherto he had succeeded, if not in forgetting, at any rate in driving from his mind all distinct, definite images of Bella and Pierre. He would not think of them as being married, and did his best

not to think of them at all. And now they had entered his very being, cruelly, brutally, by force, so to speak, torturing him beyond endurance. It was indeed too cruel!

He read once more the last sentence of the letter, as though to understand the better: 'Dear father, it is to you we owe all this happiness of ours, for you have sacrificed yourself to assure it; we thank you from the very depths of our hearts. . . .' Yes, it was to Dartigues this happiness was due! It was Dartigues who had overwhelmed Claude Brun with his superiority, forced him to renounce his plan of vengeance, to swallow the insult he had received, and leave the country like a coward, when he might have obtained so sweet a revenge in killing this young, handsome and favoured rival. And he had yielded. Oh, how he regretted it now!—yielded to Dartigues' threats, to Francine's ascendancy, and to his own despondency; he had bowed his head in subjection to his fate.

At this very moment he once more heard Dartigues' voice exclaiming: 'You shall not fight with Pierre; it is with me you will have to deal, and, depend upon it, I will kill you!' This was quite true; he was certain of it. He had the conviction that Dartigues would have killed him. Fear had seized him. He ground his teeth in anguish. Fear! Fear of what? Of dying? Nonsense! Of what value was life to him? Fear of offering his enemies a fresh triumph? Perhaps! Fear of losing an opportunity for revenge? Yes, certainly yes! Oh, revenge! He was forced to come to this, for his life was becoming intolerable. Could he lend his presence to Dartigues' apotheosis?

No, he had done all he could; his strength was now at an end; the torture that was consuming him could endure no longer. He flung back the letter on to the desk as though it burnt his hand. Trembling and pale, his brain in a whirl with conflicting thoughts, he left the room.

The authorities had taken up their posts under tents along the banks of the channel. The Kroumir chiefs, the representatives of the Bey, the officers of the State-Major, the General, the delegates of the Governor of Algeria, were all stationed in front of the motley crowd of natives. In the centre of the empty dock, a vast arena in which a score of vessels might have manœuvred for a sea-fight, stood Dartigues alone. He was walking to and fro, proud of his work, ready to give the signal for the inflow of the water into the harbour constructed according to his directions. Catching a glimpse of Claude Brun, he gave him a sign, and the latter made his way along the narrow stairs descending into the sluice, and advanced to meet his partner. An iron gate was on the last step, to the level of which the water would rise once the sluice was full. The key happened to be in the lock. Claude gave it a double turn, took it out, and placed it in his pocket. A smile passed over his pale, thin lips, and the colour mounted to his pallid countenance. He muttered to himself:

'Now I have his life in my hands!'

Descending the steps, he met Dartigues entering the sluice. The dreamer's face shone with triumph; he had now at last realized his dream. Turning to his partner, he said:

'A glorious day has at last dawned for us! The

Cabinet Minister has just informed me that you are to be nominated officer of the Legion of Honour, whilst I . . .'

He stopped, scarcely unable to continue for joy.

'I am to be a candidate at the Senatorial Election, to take place next month in the Gard department. . . . This time victory is certain, for there will be no serious rival in the field. . . . You see, my ambition will be crowned at last!'

'You will only receive your due,' said Claude. 'Where would justice have fled to were you not to receive your reward?'

The tone in which these words were uttered instantly attracted Dartigues' attention. He asked:

'Are you not satisfied with your share of the triumph?'

'The rosette! How could I be other than satisfied!'

'Would you like anything else? If so you have only to speak, for the authorities are in a humour to grant us anything now.'

'No, I want nothing. . . . But look, everybody is waiting. Will you not give the signal?'

'I shall not give it till we have reached the stairs leading from the sluice. . . . From that position the spectacle of the water rushing into the dock in one mighty wave will be a splendid one. I have reserved it for you and me alone.'

'How long does the sluice take to fill?'

'Ten minutes.'

'Then you may give the signal at once. Here we are at the steps.'

Dartigues raised his head, and saw the director of the works, who was on the look-out for the signal.

Raising his hat, he exclaimed in a loud voice of triumph :

'Open !'

Claude and he mounted to the first stair-head. A view could be obtained into the sluice by means of a broad thick glass set in copper. The windlasses were set in motion. The gates opened, and the water in silver streams came flowing through the opening, grew in volume, and swelled into one mighty column of liquid green, thundering into the dock like an impetuous torrent. This rush of foaming waves offered a magnificent spectacle before which Claude and Dartigues stood fascinated. The water approaching the steps on which they stood recalled them to a consciousness of their position.

'Shall we return ?' asked Dartigues.

He went first, but on reaching the door saw that the key was missing. Turning with pallid countenance to his companion, he said :

'Give me the key !'

'Did you not bring it with you ?'

'No !'

'The water is rising,' said Claude coldly.

Dartigues began furiously to shake the heavy iron gate. He cried out aloud :

'Open the gate ! We have been caught between it and the water. . . .'

'How do you expect anyone will be able to hear you ?' sneered Claude. 'The sound of the waves drowns your voice. I can scarcely hear you myself, though close by your side !'

These words sent a flood of light into Dartigues' brain. He now understood, and a terrible expression came over his face.

'You wretch!' he exclaimed. 'It is you who have shut this door!'

'Certainly!' said Claude.

'Where is the key?'

'In my pocket.'

'Give it to me!'

Claude shook his head without a word.

'That key means life or death!' shrieked Dartigues. He repeated: 'Give it to me!'

Then the other assumed a terrible aspect, and with a look of revenge and hate he asked Dartigues:

'Did you give me Bella?'

'Ah, you coward! However, I will force you to open out a passage for me!'

'He flung himself upon Claude, who took the key from his pocket, and with a rapid gesture flung it into the sluice. Then Dartigues, horror-struck as the water mounted higher and higher, and approached the gate which resisted all his efforts, began to shriek out horrible blasphemies. His hands were bleeding with his desperate efforts to open the gate. All was in vain. Suddenly a mad frenzy seized him. With a shriek of despair, he seized Claude by the throat, and, in spite of his resistance, in spite of the desperate blows with which he attempted to resist, the madman seized him in his arms and plunged into the glaucous waves, which had already reached their feet.

* * * * *

Des Barres, Pierre, and Bella had met together in the salon of the Rue du Luxembourg after dining with M. and Mme. Appel. Pierre and his wife were dressed in heavy mourning. Dartigues had been dead six months. Des Barres, who was smoking a pipe by special permission, said:

'Is your business with the notary finished, and your father's affairs definitely liquidated?'

'Yes,' replied Pierre; 'the registration duties have been paid.'

'It was an enormous sum,' said Francine.

'Not large enough, all the same,' declared Des Barres. 'Inheritance as a system is a monstrosity from the humanitarian point of view. Socially considered, it is moderated by nothing else than the recovery effected by the State under the form of duties. . . . Will you kindly explain to me how it can possibly appear right that Dartigues' millions should pass into Pierre's hands?'

'And you, with all your talent,' said Appel, 'can you prove to our satisfaction why a father's fortune should pass more justly into the hands of strangers than into those of his own son?'

'Oh, I am well aware that with your bourgeois ideas . . .'

'My dear Des Barres,' said Francine gently, 'reform society, you and your friends, by ameliorating it if only you can. I should be glad to see it done. But give up all idea of interfering with the system of inheritance in France. The undertaking of such a task would undo you. Inheritance is the normal consequence of the idea of family life. . . . And the day you attempt to interfere with family life you will have all the women in France against you, and your party will be utterly ruined.'

Des Barres made no reply. He puffed away strongly at his pipe, and after a moment's silence said to Pierre:

'What is the value of the inheritance?'

'My father's fortune is estimated to be worth twenty-two million francs.'

'Suppose we say thirty?'

'If you like.'

Des Barres' eyes shone, and an arch smile came over his face as he asked:

'With your tastes and habits, I can imagine that you must be terribly embarrassed with so much money. What do you intend to do with it?'

Pierre looked up at his questioner, then glanced at Bella, who gave him a tender smile.

'I will do what my mother and Dr. Appel have taught me to do with money. I will follow the example they have set me ever since I could understand or reason about anything at all, and do all I can to help the poor and wretched.'

These words, a witness to his moral victory, brought tears to the doctor's eyes. He saw that at this moment of triumph he was amply compensated for all the troubles of the past. Rising to his feet, he laid his hand on the shoulder of his adoptive son, and replied simply:

'You have just recompensed me far beyond all I had hoped, my child, for whatever I have done for you. From the bottom of my heart I thank you!'

THE END

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